THE GEORGE and THE CROWN

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

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THE GEORGE AND THE CROWN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TAMARISK TOWN
JOANNA GODDEN
GREEN APPLE HARVEST
THE CHALLENGE TO SIRIUS
THE FOUR ROADS
THE TRAMPING METHODIST
THE END OF THE HOUSE OF ALARD
ISLE OF THORNS

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

THE GEORGE AND THE CROWN

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

AUTHOR OF "THE END OF THE HOUSE OF ALARD," ETC.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

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First	*Printing*	*March,*	*1925*
Second	"	"	"
Third	"	"	"
Fourth	"	"	"
Fifth	"	"	"
Sixth	"	"	"
Seventh	"	"	"
Eighth	"	"	"
Ninth	"	"	"

Printed in the United States of America

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To
G. B. STERN

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THE GEORGE AND THE CROWN

THE GEORGE AND THE CROWN

PROLOGUE

HIS name was Thomas Sheather, and he was born in the Ouse Valley of Sussex, between Lewes and Newhaven—her name was Kitty le Couteur, and she lived at the Pêche à Agneau, in the island of Sark; so it was strange that they should have met and married. Nevertheless, their marriage took place in the little island church of Peter the Fisherman, among the memorials of the drowned, with their refrain: *"Ta voie a été par la mer et tes sentiers dans les grosses eaux."*

Tom had come to Guernsey in a coaster from Deal, a tramp which had butted her way along the coasts of Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, and Dorset, and then adventured south in the tomato season. There had been a longish wait for repairs at St. Sampson's—the *Queen of the May* had been built for coasting, and the coasts of England, even at Land's End, have no weather like the weather of the Casquets and the Burhous. Tom had spent a great deal of his time ashore, exploring this new island of forts and greenhouses, and he had met Kitty le Couteur at the home of her cousins, the le Cheminants, who kept an eating house in St. Peter Port.

Kitty was small and slim and dark, with big black eyes burning in her pointed face. She wore little dark modest garments with long tight sleeves, and demure aprons of which she was not ashamed. She had never seen a railway, and was afraid to go in a tram-car. She was quite unlike

the girls at home, and her voice was unlike their voices, with its pretty Frenchy accent like the twitter of a bird. She called him Mister Sheeter very sedately, and it was quite three days before he could persuade her to come with him for a walk, and then nothing would make her go out of town. But she told him more about herself this time, about her home in Sark, right away at the Pêche à Agneau, beyond the road's end—about her father who kept the farm, and her brothers Eugene and Philip who sailed the cutter, about her own life, lived between sea and sky, in which this visit to Guernsey was the first adventure.

"My father he not mind me come before, but my brother Eugene and my brother Philip say 'if you go to Guernsey you meet strangers, and perhaps you marry a stranger, or even an Englishman.'"

Tom cared nothing for brother Eugene nor for brother Philip. Kitty's pale face and dark eyes now held the magic which the sea was beginning to lose. When the *Queen of the May* started north with pounding paddle-boxes and a cargo of tomatoes, she left Tom Sheather behind in the island of forts and greenhouses, taking in his stead a Cornishman who wanted to see his home after ten years of gathering *vraic*. . . . Tom stayed behind as an extra hand for the tomato-picking. He worked on an estate near Torteval, and once a week he crossed over to Sark in the Saturday excursion steamer, and walked along Sark's high backbone to its granite horns, to where Helier le Couteur's house looks over the sloping bracken to Rouge Caneau and Moie de la Bretagne.

He was well received by the old man himself, a kindly, simple creature who loved his daughter and was proud of the admiration she had kindled in the stranger's breast. He could speak very little English, so their intercourse consisted chiefly of bowings and smiles. The brothers were unfortunately more fluent, as a part of their business was to take visitors fishing and sailing, and they were not slow to let Tom hear their disapproval of his courtship.

"Our sister never marry a Guernseyman or an Englishman," said Philip.

"Oh, my gar! she do not," said Eugene.

But she did.

Old Helier was ruler of his household, and when he saw that not only did the stranger love Kitty but that Kitty loved the stranger, he refused to let the island prejudices against England and Guernsey stand in her light. Besides, it was not true, he told his sons, that the stranger was *vagabond*. His parents lived in a comfortable house near the big town of Sussex, and had written the bride's father a very aristocratic letter, which *le ministre* had read to him, and in which they told him of their intention to do well for the young couple. Then why did he go to sea in a dirty coaster and turn tomato-picker, says Eugene? Why, because there are horse-races in England, just as there are in Guernsey, and the young man lost his money at them, just as they do in Guernsey, and ran away to sea rather than face his father afterwards—which shows he had been well brought up. But his father was now ready to forgive him, and was delighted that he should be marrying a good pretty girl like Kitty, whose photograph, taken by a lady visitor, had been sent over for him to see.

So Tom and Kitty were married, in spite of the grumblings of Eugene and Philip, and settled down in one of the outlying cottages of La Belle Hautgarde. Tom helped the old man on his farm, living once more, there in the midst of the sea, a landsman's life; for the brothers would never let him come into their boat.

Time passed, and two children were born, both boys, and both with their mother's black eyes. Tom created illfeeling by the names he chose for them, first Leonard, then Daniel. They were English names—no such names had ever been given to babies in Sark. There every boy was either Peter or William or John if he was not Philip or Eugene or Helier —large clumps of Peters and Williams existing bewilderingly among swarms of Hamons and Carrés. The Sheathers

already had a foreign surname by the misfortune of their birth, and now their father had doubled their strangerhood at the font.

Then, after five years, Helier le Couteur died, and his farm became the property of Eugene, who had lately married a Hamon and begotten a Peter. Tom Sheather found his position untenable. In his own words, he was fed up. It was all very well to be on your guard with strangers—at home in the farms between Lewes and Newhaven foreigners were generally on trial for a year or two before being absorbed into the local life—but these Sarkies were just about the limit . . . when it came to making foreigners of your own kin. . . . Ever since his marriage, Eugene and Philip had mysteriously forgotten the English language, and as he couldn't learn their outlandish speech, it was impossible even to have a good quarrel. They refused to take him out in the cutter, though everyone knew he was handier with a sail than anyone in this island of toy-boats—they had persisted in treating him, their sister's husband for five years, as an outsider and interloper; and now when the old man, his only friend, was dead, he confessed himself sick of it. Life wasn't worth living in these damned islands. . . . He asked Kitty if she would go home with him to England, and she agreed—for she loved her stranger.

Nevertheless, she would have liked her third child to be born like the others in the little room whose windows were full of the sea; and when he came it was hard to persuade her that he had not taken his fair hair and blue eyes from the new pale country, instead of from his father. She could never quite get used to the pale, clear colours of the downs, to the white cliffs by Newhaven, and the grey, calm sea. But she said she would never go back to Sark—"I never go back now. It is not my country any more." Perhaps this was because—or perhaps it was why—she loved the flaxen child better than either of the black-eyed children born in her father's house.

The old Sheathers had a farm in the parish of Piddinghoe,

almost in the suburbs of Newhaven. The backward growth of the port into the Ouse Valley had greatly improved the value of their land, and they were able to do well for their prodigal, whose return they welcomed. They offered to set him up on a small farm; but Tom had grown tired of farming, just as he had grown tired of the sea—he thought he would like to be an innkeeper for a change. Since his parents were anxious to provide for him, wouldn't they put him into a nice pub? He would like the Crown at Bullockdean, for choice . . . the landlord had just died.

But the price of the Crown, which was a free house with a substantial piece of land attached to it, was too high even for a farmer whose fields are being turned into streets. Another place must be found, and after a time the George Inn, the other public house in Bullockdean, came into the market. It stood almost opposite the Crown, which was certainly a superior concern in every way . . . still, the old George wasn't so bad. It was a tied house, of course, but some people said it was none the worse for that. Tom thought it would be rather fun to see if he couldn't bust the Crown. Also, he had set his heart on establishing himself near Lewes, for he had once again begun to frequent the races, the dim first cause of his romance. Bullockdean was almost midway between Lewes and Newhaven, and Tom saw the George becoming famous as a house of call for sailors and racing men. After all, the Crown was much too high-class for him—too much like a country hotel instead of an honest pub. He liked something livelier.

So after six years beyond the sea, Tom Sheather settled down as landlord of the George at Bullockdean, and had soon forgotten the islands between England and France. The mists of the Ouse Valley blotted out the cliffs of Sark. He never thought of the unfriendly island, of Rouge Terrier or Moie Fans, of the sunset red and black behind Brecqhou, or of Eugene and Philip le Couteur mending their nets and talking to each other in their throaty foreign tongue.

PART I

THE VALLEY

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

THE George was King George the Third, and the Crown was Queen Anne's Crown, and they faced each other across the street of Bullockdean. The George had a face of stucco, cracked and discoloured with age and the mists of the Ouse Valley, and a parapet behind which its old roof rose rakish and wrinkled. The Crown's face was of ruddy brick, gashed with long, deep-set windows, and topped by a huge pediment of new-painted whiteness.

So close and friendly were they that from one bar-parlour you could almost see what was going on in the other—that is, if you cared to look; but on the whole the doings in the bar of the George had very little interest for the bar of the Crown, and contrariwise. The Crown catered chiefly for sedate farmers and good-class visitors from Lewes, Newhaven, and Eastbourne—the George catered for the rowdied elements of all three towns, which frequented it at race-time, and the more disreputable, poaching class of farm labourer. The only occasion when the two inns had had any manner of warfare was when Mr. Munk, the landlord of the Crown, sent over a dignified protest at the noise made by the George's dispersing drunks at closing time; whereat Mr. Sheather, the landlord of the George, had retorted that the sight of the Crown's lady-visitors undressing with the blind up was demoralising his family.

On the whole the neighbourhood disapproved of the George and approved of the Crown, though both were equally frequented by different elements of local society. The stain on the George's sign was drunkenness, and, it was whispered, betting too. Still, as everyone said, what

could you expect from a man like Tom Sheather, who had gone roving in his youth and brought back a wife from foreign parts? It was his own fault if the George was but a sorry pub, while the Crown was very nearly a hotel, with visitors staying all the summer. Visitors would never stay at the George, even if there was room for them, which there was not. Tom Sheather filled the place up with his roughs, such as decent farmers would not drink with. He'd have racing-men from Lewes, a drunken, sharky lot—he'd have sailormen from Newhaven, making a night of it in a hired shay. The Oddfellows had given up meeting at the George ever since the crew of a Margate trawler had insisted on playing their piano for them; and if the Buffaloes still met there it was only because Mr. Batup, their grandmaster, had a liking for old Tom in spite of his rotten ales.

As a matter of fact, most people liked Tom Sheather, though it was agreed that you could never quite trust him, and that you felt sorry for his second boy Daniel, who was always having to play policeman to his dad. The eldest son was married, and had a sad little farm over at Brakey Bottom, beyond Telscombe, while the third boy, Christopher, was no good to anybody. His mother spoilt him, and gossip accused her of having kept him at home by disreputable means, when other women's sons and her own elder boys had gone to the war.

The war had dealt hardly with the George. The suspension of racing, the limitation of the hours in which liquor could be sold, the no-treating order—all had been bad for the George's particular constitution, whereas the Crown had thriven on high prices and a congested population. Also, James Munk had money come to him through his wife, who at her death had left her entire fortune to his enjoyment and disposal. While Tom Sheather had none, for his parents at their death, shortly before the war, were shown not to have dealt very wisely with the landlords of streets, and of the little that they left, nothing remained after a few years' fluency in Tom's hands. It was obvious

that he had not realised his ambition of busting the Crown. But if there was little comfort in the thought that he owed his failure largely to his own mismanagement, there was considerable alleviation in the fact that it troubled him not at all. He still thought the George was a better pub than the Crown—he would rather be in debt to his brewer and have a good crowd of boys round him, than be solvent and honourable like James Munk, and have nothing but a couple of old maids dozing in his parlour—which he had let off to them, so that he and his son Ernley had to sit in the kitchen.

Anyhow Tom was better off in his home and family than poor Munk, whose wife was dead and whose elder son had been killed in the war, leaving him with no one but Ernley, whom everybody knew was rotten—an officer and a gentleman, but rotten. Whereas Tom had a tidy little wife—even if she was growing a bit sharp-tongued these days and inclined to snap her old man's head off—and three spanking boys: Len, who was clever as you made 'em, for all he hadn't been educated at Lancing College like some folks' sons; Dan who was the stoutest, handiest chap between Lewes and the sea; and Kit who was the handsomest . . . He was glad they'd all three come safe through the war, and if ever he wished that the old George was a better paying concern, it was for their sakes . . . He'd have liked to be able to buy Len some new machinery for that farm of his, which wouldn't produce more than one quarter to the acre—and Chris had been badgering him for months because he wanted new breeches and leggings—and it wouldn't have been a bad thing if old Dan could have had a boy to help him in the yard . . . But there you were—times were bad for innkeepers, unless they were foxy like old Munk—and anyhow, it was good to have his three boys under his roof, even if he couldn't give them all he and they wanted. He liked to see them sitting in his bar.

§ 2

They were all three sitting there that evening in February, just twenty minutes before six and opening-time. Len had come over from Telscombe to an auction at Tarring Neville, and was on his way back, disappointed because of high prices. Dan had just come back from Batchelors' Hall over by the Dicker—where he had gone ostensibly to sell a pig, but really, as everyone knew, to court Belle Shackford. Now he was helping Christopher and his mother polish glasses in readiness for six o'clock. The three young Sheathers were much of a middle-size, but they were very different in face and colouring. Leonard and Daniel were both dark, but whereas the former had his mother's sharp nose and chin, the latter had the broad face, short nose, and wide mouth of his Saxon fathers. Christopher was blue-eyed and flaxen, with a weaker version of Dan's blunt nose, and a sulky, inviting mouth.

There was a shuffling, scurrying sound outside, followed by a rap on the door.

"Go see who that is, Dan," said Kitty. "We aren't open yet."

Dan unlocked the door, and revealed an ancient shepherd in charge of some muddy tegs.

"Hullo, Mr. Gadgett! What brings you round at this time?"

"'Tis gone six o'clock, Maas' Sheather."

"Not for half-an-hour," called Kitty from the bar.

Mr. Gadgett consulted an elderly turnip.

"My watch says three o'clock, which means ten minutes past six," he affirmed.

"And my clock says half-past five, which means half-past five," said Kitty.

The old man heaved a deep sigh.

"I comed all the way from Brakey Bottom, and there's a wunnerful lot of mud on the roads. Leastways it wur wunst on the roads—reckon it's all on my boots now."

"Poor old chap," said Tom—"I can't see any harm in serving him. It's nearly opening time."

"Oh, no, Dad, it isn't," said Daniel.

"Besides, if it was," said Len, "even if it was only two minutes to six, you'd be breaking the damn law just the same. The law's a fine thing, ain't it, Mr. Gadgett?"

The shepherd looked confused and weary.

"Wot wud six o'clock, and two o'clock and ten o'clock, I'm wunnerful muddled."

Dan felt sorry for him.

"Maybe we could let you have a cup of tea since it's too early for beer," he suggested.

"Well, you go into the kitchen and make it," said his mother, "since you're the only one who's doing nothing."

This statement was open to challenge, but Dan accepted it good-humouredly.

"I'm a fine handy one with the tea, ain't I, Mum? . . . You come around to the kitchen door, Mr. Gadgett, and I'll give you as good as ale."

When he was gone, Leonard took his pipe out of his mouth.

"This is an all-fool's game with the clock. I wonder you stick it, Dad. If I was you I'd kick for my right to sell my own beer at my own time."

"It ain't my own beer, seeing I haven't paid for it yet."

"Maybe you could pay for it easy enough if they didn't tie you hand and foot in your trade. I tell you, this sort of thing makes me sick. Us working like slaves, and getting nothing but abuse and interference . . . they said, 'Come and fight for your country and we'll give you a country fit for heroes.' Now they say, 'You've fought for your country—thanks—now get out of it.' They tell us strong chaps to go and emigrate, and I'm——"

"Well, I'd do it for two pins."

"Don't you make him think of it," cried Kitty.

"He won't be such a fool. Besides, it isn't the same

for him as for me. He didn't lose four years mucking about, though it wasn't his fault, like some . . ."

"Now, don't you go hitting at me," said Chris.

"I'm not hitting at you. It wasn't your fault, neither—and I'd never blame a young boy of eighteen for not choosing to go out and get killed. But I blame those chaps that hid in government offices, and wore uniforms, and got a thousand a year, and call themselves Major and Colonel these days, and say to us poor fellows who were fools enough to get sent out to France . . ."

"Oh, chuck it, Len," said Chris.

"You're a fine chap to say 'chuck it.'"

"You said you never blame him," broke in his mother.

"No more I do, but he's got to let me talk."

And talk he did.

§ 3

Meanwhile in the kitchen, Dan made tea for old Mr. Gadgett. He had none of the normal awkwardness and shame of a man making tea. The special complications of his life had taught him to be handy at most things. He blew up the dying fire into a roar, filled the kettle with fresh water, fetched tea from the caddy and a cup from the shelf, just as efficiently and a good deal more graciously than his mother would have done. Old Gadgett watched him from the chair where he sat stiffly, as one unused to rest.

"You're a wunnerful kind young chap, Maas' Sheather, and some day if you'll come around to my house I'll show you what I ain't shown nobody yet."

"And what may that be?" asked Daniel.

"My teeth."

"Your teeth!"

"Yes, you come around to my house and I'll show you my teeth."

"But I didn't know as you had any," said Dan, with a rather tactless stare at the thin, receding old mouth.

"No, there ain't many as knows—there's doctor, and there's Miss Belle, and now there's yourself—that's all. I don't go wearing them about the place. But I've a wunnerful fine set of teeth."

"Got 'em at the hospital?" asked Dan, as he set the tea on the table.

Mr. Gadgett, with deliberate, shaking hands, emptied his cup into his saucer, and supped a few mouthfuls before answering impressively:

"No—not I. I made 'em myself."

"Reckon that was smart of you. How did you do it?"

"It's taken me nigh on ten year. They're sheep's teeth, wot I've picked up on the hill, and rubbed 'em and filed 'em till they're a proper size. And I've strung 'em on two wires and I hitch 'em around two old stumps I've got . . . you never saw the like."

Dan was properly impressed.

"Reckon you're a hem clever man, Mr. Gadgett; and I bet you find 'em useful at supper-time."

Mr. Gadgett looked superior.

"Oh, I'd never use 'em for eating. They ain't that kind of teeth—and I don't say as I can rightly speak wud 'em . . . I wear 'em for the looks of things. Some day I mean to have my likeness took wud them in. But if you come around to my house I'll show 'em to you."

"I'll come one day when I'm at Batchelors. I'll be proud."

"Reckon it ain't everyone I'd show 'em to. But you've done me a kindness to-day, Maas' Sheather, and it ain't the fust. I often wish as my poor Ellen cud see my teeth, for many's the time she's said: 'If we cud only get you fitted for a set of teeth, maaster.' . . . Maybe it's wot put the notion into my head, and I'm larmentable sorry she didn't live to see wot I done. Howsumever, they may have told her where's she's gone. . . . There's my dog barking—reckon the sheep's uneasy; I mun be off, or I'll lose the moon before I get to Batchelors. Thank you kindly for the tea, Maas' Sheather."

He went out, comfortable and slaked. It was now nearly six—a few more minutes would have seen him in legal enjoyment of a glass of beer—but, reflected Daniel, a cup of tea was better for these old chaps. He wished the George would provide it as a matter of course, instead of selling only brewer's stuff. They'd never get on that way—but Dad cared for nothing but messing about in the bar, and mother said she'd work enough without waiting on strangers. . . . Dan shrugged and whistled himself into his overcoat, then went back into the taproom.

"Where are you going, Dan?" asked Kitty.

"Just round to the Parsonage to fix that henhouse, and then I'll go and see old Ernie for a bit."

"You're never at home. Is it not enough you going out all day without being out half the night as well?"

"The evening's my best time for seeing my friends."

"And a fine set of friends you have—a clergyman who has holes in his coat, and a young girl who already makes herself the talk of the place with your other friend—and he's a lazy, fine, wicked, extravagant young boy who rides about the country on a motor-bike and keeps an inn that he says is better than ours."

"And so it is, if you go by class—I'm unaccountable fond of old Ernie, anyway. And reckon no one's any call to say anything against Miss Shackford—for it ain't true, and I won't listen to it neither. And as for Mr. Marchbanks, he pays me for what I do for him, and it ain't much."

"Oh, you be off, then. I got Christopher to help me. Thank God I got one son who stays at home."

"Thank God you haven't got two," said Daniel good-humouredly, "or the bills ud never get paid."

"Now, don't you get saucy."

"He ain't saucy, Kit," put in his father—"he's only reminding you that all his outings ain't for pleasure. The boy's a good boy, sure enough."

Dan looked deprecatingly at his mother. He wondered what she would do if he took her in his arms and cuddled

her. He had often wanted to, but something about her made him shy. She would not like it from him as she would from Chris—he had often seen Chris put his arms round his mother and lay his cheek against her shoulder. . . . He wanted to do that. But—well, he didn't like to, somehow. He pulled his cap over the thick, shiney, black hair which was brushed back undivided from his forehead, and went out with rather a sheepish look in her direction.

"You'll be back before closing-time," his father called after him.

"Yes—I'll be back."

His voice came to them with the chiming of the church clock as it struck six.

"Open the bar!" cried Tom Sheather.

§ 4

It was nearly dark when Daniel went out—a sheet of lingering red in the west showed up the masses of Fore Hill and Bullock Down, but the rest of the sky was a dim, lightless grey, pricked with a few stars, and the valley beneath was grey, with the river dark among the mists, save where its waters held one glimmer at the Shine.

Dan blew on his hands, for he was cold; but his work at the Parsonage would soon warm him. He must get on with that henhouse . . . . and if the bulbs were to go in, they'd better go in now. He wanted the garden to look nice by springtime . . . it would want a bit of manure—he would see if he couldn't get some from Place. . . .

Bullockdean Parsonage was a big ramshackle house, where the unmarried Rector camped like some squatter in the vastness of the prairie. Its few tokens of care and ornament—that is to say, a bright blue gate, and windows and doors in the piecemeal process of becoming blue, also an artistic flower-bed border of bottle glass and scallop shells—were the fruits of Daniel's industry. Daniel "had an arrangement" with Mr. Marchbanks—that is to say, he had quasi-sole

charge of the house and the garden for ten shillings a week. This worked out to the Rector's advantage in that he would never have found anyone else to do half the work for twice the money, so he was willing to put up with a certain growing eccentricity in the appearance of his domain. It also worked out to Daniel's advantage, for he could come and go as he pleased, suiting his hours to the demands of the George. At the same time it helped lighten that house's financial burden, for ten shillings a week he knew went far in his mother's thrifty housekeeping.

To-night he stood for a moment at the gate, contemplating his handiwork with a satisfied smile. One of the lower windows was lighted, and he could see through its uncurtained panes a young man stooping over a writing table covered with books and papers. Mr. Marchbanks was busy, and Dan had better get on with his jobs without troubling him.

Dan had an almost maternal feeling for Mr. Marchbanks, who had not been in Bullockdean more than two years. He came from a big church in Oxford, where, by report, he had spent his time in study and in writing books. Why he had chosen to leave it for the care of an obscure Sussex parish was his own private adventure. He was still, after two years' residence, inclined to be shy of his country parishioners, whose ways were so unlike the ways of Oxford; and they, on their side, were inclined to look down on him for his lack of clerical state. Also, immediately after his arrival, he had made an almost fatal mistake. He had failed to see the devotional aspect of a composition known as White-Wilcox in C, which had been sung at Harvest Festivals in Bullockdean from the days they were first started. All unknowing the enormity he was contemplating, and having already made, without outcry, several small changes in the direction of simplicity, he abolished White-Wilcox's crashes and quavers, and substituted plainsong. The earth shook—the skies roared—the heavens fell.

More literally, the Choir went on strike—the people's warden joined the Wesleyans—and a protest was drawn up by the Oddfellows in the bar of the Crown, and then taken across to be signed by the Buffaloes in the bar of the George, providing yet another instance of the Odium Gregorianum.

Then Mr. Marchbanks made a still worse blunder. He retracted. Moved with pity for the simple souls he had offended, and realising that he had really dethroned the local God, whose identity he had at first been at some loss to discover, he restored White-Wilcox in C to his former glory. As he confined himself almost entirely to the repeated statement that "Lebanon skips like a calf, Sirion also like a young unicorn," there was nothing that made him unfit for Christmas, Easter, or Whitsun, or other occasions of rejoicing. Once more his familiar arpeggios wheezed forth on the organ, once more Mr. Pilbeam's alto took, even though it could not hold, notes above the stave, while cantori and decani became antiphonally calves and unicorns, and old Auntie Harman "joined in" as usual from her pew, and you heard, as usual, her nieces Jess and Maudie "shushing her down." Mr. Marchbanks thought he had re-established himself. But, on the contrary, he had only doubled his error. His congregation would now more than ever talk regretfully of "the old days" which had been before he came. The "old reverend" would never have taken away White-Wilcox in C, but if he had, he would most certainly never have put him back again—he'd have seen the entire congregation Wesleyans first.

It was during these months of crisis that the Rector and Daniel Sheather became friends. Dan had no special devotion for White-Wilcox, and he had never loved the "old reverend," who had once thrashed him for putting a firework in the hinge of the Parsonage gate. He was sorry for Mr. Marchbanks, who so obviously didn't know his job, and so obviously wanted looking after by a sensible chap. There being no mistress at the Rectory made him par-

ticularly vulnerable to the form of attack which Dan called "helping around." He had soon obtained control of all the outside of the house and of the Parson's boots as well.

This evening he used the last of the fading light for planting bulbs—hyacinths and tulips, whose origin in the borders of Place Farm might have distressed the Rector had he known of it. Then when it grew too dark to see, he went into the shed, and, lighting a candle, tinkered away at the henhouse he was making. He had decided that Mr. Marchbanks was going to keep fowls, and had arranged with the chicken boy at Upper Barndean to supply him with one or two good pullets for a start.

§ 5

At eight o'clock he stopped work, put away his tools, locked up the shed, and went quietly off. It was now very cold indeed—a snap of frost made the stars shiver above the black ridges of the downs, and Daniel walked quickly, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his overcoat, and his collar turned up to his red ears. It was bad luck never having quite enough clothes to keep you warm. . . . However, it would be warm enough at the Crown—Ernley always had a good fire, and often a good drink of something hot as well.

The bar of the Crown was altogether a superior affair to the bar of the George. The sawdust on the floor was thicker, the windows were covered with cosy, bright, red curtains, and there were one or two comfortable chairs about. Moreover, behind the counter stood pleasant Maudie Harman, with her slow, pretty ways and welcoming smile.

"Good evening, Mr. Sheather," she greeted him. "It's some days since you've been in."

"Good evening, Miss Harman. How are you? And how's Auntie and your sister Jess?"

"Oh, we're all fine. Jess is looking after Doctor Penny's children now. She gets six bob a week and her dinner."

"Say, that's good! I bet your auntie's pleased, with the two of you doing so well."

"Oh, she's pleased inside, I reckon, though she don't say much out, 'cept that we're hussies, for we both bought lace collars last week."

"And uncommon smart you look in them. I saw them in church on Sunday."

"Well, I tell Auntie that we must dress a bit, seeing as everybody knows us. . . . Yes, Mr. Luck—two sherries in a minute."

She hastily took her elbows off the counter and became professional. Dan saw that James Munk had come into the bar.

"Evening," he said glumly—"is Ernley in?"

He hated James Munk for a variety of reasons, the chief one of which was that he wielded a weapon against which Daniel Sheather, like most of his class, stood helpless—the weapon of sarcasm. He never knew whether or not the landlord of the Crown was "getting at him"—his simplest remarks were full of danger, his praise was barbed, his blame two-edged. Dan in his presence became a mumbling oaf.

"Evening," repeated Munk, in tones of courtesy—"Ernley is in his room."

"Well, I'd better go upstairs."

"Yes, I think that would be the best way to get there."

Munk did not like having the young Sheathers in his bar—his comfort was that they never stayed there long. Daniel was now halfway up the stairs, stumbling in the darkness, and wondering exactly where he had been stung. The Crown people were almost like gentry with their talk and their ways. The queer thing was that he didn't in the least mind old Ernie's imitation of a gentleman though he hated his father's.

He knocked at Ernie's door. It was merely a consoling fiction of Tom Sheather's that James and his son had to

sit in the kitchen because their parlour was let to visitors. It was often so let, it is true, but Ernley would never have sat in it. He had a room of his own, a long, low, comfortable room that ran along the frontage of the Crown, and looked out over its sign at the village street. A bright wood fire burned luxuriously in the grate, showing the thick carpet and comfortable chairs, and Ernley's bed with its warm quilt—lighting up his pictures and dancing on the covers of his books.

"Hullo, Dan—that you?"

"Hullo, Ernie."

Dan came in and sat down on the other side of the fire.

"What'll you have to drink?"

"Oh, I dunno."

"May as well have the port out—you look cold."

"It's turned cold."

Ernley fetched a bottle and glasses out of the cupboard. He was a tall, well-made, well-dressed young man, with a dark complexion and queer, restless eyes. He and Daniel had been in the same battalion of the Sussex Regiment. They had joined up about the same time, and they had been together in the second battle of Ypres, where Ernley had been wounded and gassed. Soon afterwards he had been given a commission, and his way and Dan's had parted, but their friendship—superseding a mere distrustful acquaintanceship—had remained. There was a world of difference between them—difference in birth; for Ernley's mother, at least, had been well-born; in education, for Ernley had been to Lancing College and Daniel to the Council School, and in character, for Ernley had queer dark hidden ways and moody adventures in which Dan could not share. But the friendship stood firm, built on a double set of memories—memories of childhood spent in the same village, of games and jealousies and quests, and memories of the black and ravaged soil of Flanders, of horrors and dangers and terrors and squalors, lit up by queer gleams of human

laughter . . . it was strange, thought Daniel, that he should have remembered all the jokes he and Ernley used to have together, about rats and dud crumps and the Corporal and plum-and-apple jam, and should have forgotten all the rest—except at the distressed end of sleep. . . . He did not think Ernley had forgotten so much, and that was perhaps why he was often difficult and mood-ridden, requiring the whole of his friend's toleration.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" asked Ernie. "I was expecting you."

"I went over to Brakey Bottom. Len was that done over his pigs, and Em having a headache and all——"

"Which did you look after, Em or the pigs?"

"Both," said Dan innocently—"I give Em her mixture, seeing old Len's in a terrification, and heated her a brick, to draw it out of her feet—and as for the pigs, I tell Len straight they've got pneumonia and he may as well kill 'em quick before they die."

"Then there's no use strafing you because you didn't come to me, but I wish you hadn't quite so many people to look after, or that you'd count me in as one of them."

"I do count you in—not that you want looking after as much as some."

"But I do. That's where you make a mistake—you put too much stress on physical comfort. If a chap's got good boots, you never think there's anything more he can want."

"Well, you seem to have a lot besides boots. Howsumever, Ernie, you can't say I haven't done my bit to help in other ways—it's only that things being so muddled up these times . . ."

"I know—I know. I'll never forget, old chap, how you worked through that awful business. By the way"—carelessly—"have you seen her at all of late?"

"I saw her this afternoon."

"The devil you did—and how is she?"

"Oh, she looked fine."

"Oh . . . I say, do you think she's heard anything about me and Pearl?"

"I don't think she has. Anyway she didn't speak of it."

There was a moment's silence. Dan broke it first.

"Are you still so keen on Pearl?"

"Of course I am. The affair's only just starting."

"And she on you?"

Ernley smiled reminiscently. "She seems willing enough."

"Going to see her again soon?"

"I'm taking her to a *thé-dansant* in Eastbourne to-morrow."

"Lor!" Dan was impressed by this aristocratic wooing. Then he gulped a little, and turned red.

"Then you aren't sweet on Belle any more, Ernley."

"Good Lord, man, no. I've cut that off clean. It's over and done with, thank God!"

He got up and took a turn across the room, passing into the shadows beyond the firelight.

"She hasn't sent a message . . . said anything to you, has she?" he asked—"because I tell you I'm through with it all. I've had enough of kissing and making it up. I tell you it's done with now. There's no good her trying to whistle me back again."

"She ain't trying, Ernley. She never spoke of you. It's only I'm thinking, that if you've really stopped caring and have got someone else, I—I'd have a shot at courting her myself."

Ernley suddenly stopped his pacing. He turned and faced Daniel, but as he was still in the shadow, young Sheather could not read his face.

"I've been sweet on her for months," continued the boy—"but I wouldn't speak a word, seeing as you hadn't got properly shut of each other. It's only when you started courting Pearl I thought it really must be the end."

"It is the end. But you're a fool, Daniel, if you think Belle Shackford will have you."

His voice came cruelly at Dan. Ernley could sometimes

speak like that—all fierce and cruel—but it was better than being sarcastic.

"Why shouldn't she have me?" asked Daniel, much hurt. "I've got as much chance as anyone else, haven't I?"

"I'm sorry, old chap. I didn't mean to be offensive. What I meant to say is this: that we're so different; it's hardly reasonable to expect a girl who's liked me to like you, and t'other way round. And anyhow, it's only three weeks since our break. You're a much more cynical fellow than I thought if you can expect any girl to console herself so soon."

"But that's just it," said Dan sagely, "it's the rebound. They're more likely to take up with someone else in the first month than afterwards. Look at Mrs. Light, look at Letty Pilbeam—look at yourself, Ernley."

Ernley flushed.

"I've had a sickener. It's a relief to turn to a girl who's not always tearing passion to tatters, who knows how to keep cool, and doesn't always want to get more than she gives."

"Come, Ernley, that ain't fair on Belle. Reckon she gave a lot. She ain't the sort of girl for you, that's all, and I'm glad you've got a different. She couldn't understand your ways; she'd no notion of putting up with you."

"Thanks," said Ernley.

"Well, reckon folks have always got to put up with each other. I'm not saying there weren't faults on both sides. But I'm quite a different sort of chap—more comfortable like—more easy-going—you understand what I mean. I'm as different from you as your Pearl is different from her—and if you like the change I don't see why she shouldn't."

"Is there anything—anything in her manner to make you think she'd take you?"

"Yes," said Dan confidently, "there is."

"Oh . . . it's easy-come easy-go, is it?"

"No, Ernie—you misjudge her. It's simply as she's worn out, and I'm a comfortable chap. Reckon she don't want

no more passions, just a homely sort of affair as this ud be."

"Are you able to marry her?"

"If she don't mind putting up with the George, I am. Dad and Mum ud have her and welcome if she'd help with the place . . . and though it ain't fine, it won't be any worse than Batchelors' these days. And maybe sometime we'll do better; with Belle to help, Mum wouldn't be so set against us having a tea-place and apartments and all."

"A damn fine life for her," sneered Ernley.

"Well, leastways I'll be marrying her and treating her proper."

"Now don't start getting at me. You know why I couldn't marry her—you know the way Dad treats me—that I haven't a bean of my own, and my only hope is to work round Dad so that he takes me into the business. If Belle ud have waited we could have done it some day."

"She's not the sort as waits."

"Evidently not."

He came out of the shadows, and sat down opposite Daniel beside the fire.

"I tell you, Dan, being in love is hell—it's like having your skin off—it's bloody—it's damned—it's— Well, thank God, I'm out of it, and you think twice before you go in."

"Ain't you in love with Pearl, then?"

"Not in that way—never again in that way—my God, no!"

"Well then maybe I shan't be in that way. I hope not, I'm sure."

He stuck out his legs into the fire, and stared into it, silent and satisfied. He was glad he had told Ernley about his feelings, for until then he had had an uneasy suspicion that his friend still cared, and while there was a chance of that he would not speak to Belle. But now Ernley had practically said "go in and win"—he had also implied "You'll be likelier and luckier to lose." . . . Well, time would show that. Anyhow Dan was not afraid of love. He did

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not expect it to burn him up as it had burnt up Belle and Ernie. He wasn't such a combustible sort of chap. Maybe some people would say that what he felt wasn't love at all. But it did well enough for him, and he hoped it would do well enough for Belle.

The clock in the tap-room below struck ten. Daniel sprang out of his dream.

"Losh! I must be getting back. I promised Dad I'd be back by closing-time. It's awkward for him if there's anyone drunk and won't go. Mother won't have Chris chuck 'em out, and I ain't so bad at it."

He began buttoning up his coat.

"So you're still wearing your army coat," said Ernley. "I thought it would have been done by now."

"So it is—done in, as you might say. I'd meant to get myself a new one this fall—seen it in Lewes—but Mum wanted parlour curtains, and reckon her old curtains were worse than my old coat."

"Would you like my British Warm? Dad's giving me a new one this season."

"Ernie, old chap, you don't mean it!"

"Of course I do—it's not new, but there's a lot of comfort in it yet, and if you like to have it, it's yours."

"Would I like to have it?" asked Dan. "Oh, no, of course not!"

He went home muffled in Ernley's British Warm. His humility in receiving gifts was one of the things that made their friendship delightful to both of them. But some people thought Dan Sheather was too ready to accept Ernley Munk's cast-off possessions.

§ 6

The next day broke as cold as the night had been. An early frost had touched the downs and given a faint bite to their pale colours, and the sun that rose behind Mount Caburn raked long orange beams across the Brooks.

Daniel was up before the sun, lighting the kitchen fire. This was his daily task, as his mother did not care these days for early rising, and the nondescript assistance known as "the girl" did not arrive till eight o'clock. So Daniel lit the fire, put the kettle on to boil, gave the cat its breakfast, and went out to feed the fowls and the pony, by which time the house was astir, noisily shaking itself into activity. First, Tom Sheather came thundering down the stairs, yelling after Daniel to ask if he'd remembered to order the sherry; as if not he'd have to drive into Lewes and fetch it. Then Kitty Sheather shouted to her husband that she wasn't going to fold his nightshirt and he could come back and do it himself. And last of all, Chris Sheather came yawning and stretching his supple limbs and laughing at Dan because his face was dirty.

"And I'd like to know what yours ud be if you'd been down raking out the fire instead of laying in bed like a lady."

"Well, Daniel, if you grudge helping me, I know Chris will do it," said his mother.

"I reckon he won't. Nothing ull get Chris out of bed before half-past seven. He's Miss Flossie Fluff of the Pink-tights Theatre, I reckon."

"D'you want to have your head punched?" asked Christopher.

"Yes," said Daniel. "You come on and do it."

Two hours' hard work on an empty stomach had not improved his temper—besides, it always did him good to knock Chris about.

But the battle was not to be. At the mere thought of it, Kitty Sheather threw her arms round her darling's neck and burst into tears. She would not let him fight Dan any more than she had let him fight the Germans. So Daniel had to sit down unrelieved, and eat his bread and cold bacon to the accompaniment of his mother's scolding.

"Whew!" said his father, after breakfast, as he followed him into the stable.

When the family "took sides," it was always Dan and

Tom on one side and Chris and Kitty on the other, though in his heart Dan would rather have had a different alliance.

"I sometimes think," continued Tom, "that I shall have to leg it."

"Leg it! What do you mean?"

"Beat it—sling my hooks. I can't stand being treated like this."

"But you aren't treated like anything, Dad. We all have to mind mother. It's I who got it in the neck this morning."

"Well, I don't see why you should, for you're as good a boy as ever breathed."

"I ain't. And anyways it won't help me much if you clear out. I'll be worse having to stick it alone."

"But I shan't have to watch you sitting there being wigged for what ain't your fault—me the master of my own house and not able to say a word."

"It's because you're scared."

"That's just it—I'm scared—scared in my own house—and I won't put up with it. I'm beginning to think I was a fool to leave the sea."

"The sea! But, Father, you've left the sea almost a lifetime ago. You'd never go back to it."

"A lifetime! I like your cheek. Your lifetime maybe, but not a man's, not mine. I'm only forty-six, and as strong as a dromedary. I tell you I'm wasted here—having to sit and listen to my boy being slated, when I'm not being slated myself. I'm not master in my own house."

"And would you be master on board a ship?"

"No, I shouldn't. But I shouldn't have a woman over me. It's that what stings—having a woman ordering you about all day. It ain't right. God made man the head of the woman. It says so in the Bible—and look at me. Am I your mother's head? And she promised to obey me, too—and though she said it in French it's just as good as if she'd said it in English. I asked the Minister and he told me."

"Father, I think you shouldn't ought to speak so of Mother before me."

"Well, I can't help it. I must let out before some one or I'll bust. And it's better than letting out before the chaps in the bar. You're a good boy, Daniel. I say, what if you and me was to go away together and get a sea job? Then you wouldn't have to stick it alone—and you'd like the sea, I know, for you're handy as they make 'em."

"Father! Have done, do!" Dan was aghast at such treason.

"Well, and why not?"

"You should ought to be ashamed of yourself. How's poor Mother to get on without us? and us leaving her in debt to the brewers and all—and Chris no good, and no woman ever fit to manage a pub. Father, you shouldn't ought to speak so. I'm ashamed of you."

"Lor! you've got your mother's own tongue. You take after her in that way if you don't in no other. Reckon I'm to be pitied. Howsumever, I shan't ask you for any more sympathy."

"Oh, Father, I'm ready enough if it's only sympathy you're wanting. But when you talk like that about going away, all I can say is that it's wicked."

"Well, I won't talk about it any more, since you feel bad about it."

"And you won't do anything, neither?"

"Not I. What should I do now after twenty-five years ashore? I was only joking, and wishing I hadn't been such a mortal fool as to—howsumever, you'd say that was wicked too."

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

DANIEL had not remembered to order the sherry, so most of the morning was spent in driving into Lewes to fetch it. Spot, the pony, was eighteen years old, and the trap must have been about twice as old as that, so the equipage lacked both speed and smartness. None the less Dan enjoyed the jog-trot over the Valley road, past Iford and Spring Barn and all the flat wildness of the Brooks, even though at least fifty motor cars must have passed him and covered him with dust.

"Nearly got done in, Spot, that time—nearly sent west the two of us. Yah, you brute—I've got your number"—at the whisking rear of a Rolls Royce—"road-hog, that's what you are, ain't he, Spot?"

After some mutual impoliteness with the wine merchant, whose bill had not been paid, Dan brought back the sherry, and took his stand in the bar. He generally worked in the bar of mornings, to make up for his evenings elsewhere. The mornings were comparatively sedate—a stray labourer or two, or a tramp with the price of a pint on him and generally a lot of conversation. Outside the Crown a comfortable couple of gigs were drowsing, but the George's patrons usually came on foot, except at race-time.

At last the clock struck two, sign of banishment or liberation, according to one's circumstances and point of view. Dan came into the kitchen whistling, and buttoning Ernley's British Warm up to his chin.

"Where you going now, Dan?" asked his mother.

"Over to Batchelors'. They asked me to tea."

"And when ull you be back?"

"Not till closing-time. I promised Len I'd have supper with them."

"Why, the boy's never at home."

"Well, Mum—seeing as I've been on your jobs all the morning——"

"Oh, yes, I know you grudge everything you do for me."

"But I don't, Mum. It's only, as I've told you, I must see my friends."

"You were over at Batchelors' yesterday."

"Well . . . say, is there anything you want me here for this afternoon?"

"Nothing. I got Christopher to sit by me. He don't want any sweetheart but his mother."

"He's only a kid—not old enough for girls."

"I don't like girls," said Chris.

"Well, you wait till you've cut your teeth."

"Anyways, when I take a girl, I'll take somebody fresh, not another chap's leavings."

Once more Kitty Sheather saved her darling's beauty; but this time she would not have done it if she had not run between them, for Dan was really angry.

"He's a swine to speak so—and I'll knock his head off some time when he ain't hiding behind your petticoats."

"Well, you chipped at him first—with your talk about cutting teeth."

"I don't care what I said. He's a swine to speak so. I ain't taking nobody's leavings. I—I——"

Daniel spluttered.

"Who's coat are you wearing?" mocked Kitty. "Isn't that somebody's leavings?"

"Well, seeing as . . . well, Mother, you've got no call . . . seeing as I bought your curtains . . . leastways . . ."

His anger was turning to grief and was choking him. He was only one against two this afternoon—his father having gone for a "lay down" upstairs—and he could not stand

any more of it. He muttered something thick and foolish and went out.

The air of the down cooled him. His way to Batchelors' lay across Heighton Hill—first by the little chalky path that wound up from the end of Bullockdean Street, and then by the green faint track that crossed the ridge into the wider valley of the Cuckmere. Before him spread the curves and swells of the down-top, cut into clear strips of colour by the plough—brown and gold and delicate green, with the round eye of a dew-pond looking up to the sailing clouds. Dan watched the birds that came with flurrying, dipping wings across the bottoms, and they seemed to join with the sailing clouds and the spreading down in giving him an impression of freedom and vastness, which healed. Something like this the sea would feel if he were on it . . . for the first time his father's mad scheme had an attractive savour. . . . But, no—it was foolish to think of the sea; he was a landsman born—besides he loved the land—and he loved pre-eminently two who lived on land—his mother and Belle Shackford. Neither of his loves seemed in a flourishing way just then: his mother thought of no one but her youngest boy, and he feared that Belle, in spite of what he had said to Ernie last night, was turning to him only because she wanted a contrast, wanted comfort. . . . Poor Belle! But that didn't make his loyalty any less. He owed his mother service, even if she did not appreciate it; and if all Belle wanted was comfort, then he owed her that.

As he walked over the down's back, past the dew-pond and Five Lords Bush, he wondered how many times he had taken that way on Ernie's errand. Often during the summer and continually during the autumn he had tramped to Batchelors', to inquire, to explain, to reconcile. He had carried notes in his pocket, and messages in his head; he had had to bear the blame of Belle's freezing, with occasional rewards in the praise of her melting. He had seen her angry, sorrowful, relenting, glad, tender, obdurate,

despairing. He knew all her moods, all the changes in her voice, all the changes in her eyes. Surely he had never known a woman so well; and yet with all his knowledge he had come to love her—indeed, out of knowledge and with knowledge had grown his love. He had begun to love her before the autumn was well on its way—that is, some weeks before the final quarrel, which, with one brief interval of reconciliation, had lasted over two months. And now he was free—loosed by Ernley—to go and see her on his own behalf. She had always a kind welcome for him, and he felt this could not have been unless she felt towards him pretty much as he had guessed and said. He did not flatter himself that she loved him as she had loved Ernley—but then he did not expect that, would scarcely have wanted it. He had felt the distant scorch of that fire, and he knew it belonged to an order of things he did not understand.

Ernley was right: it was terrible to love like that. Dan didn't hold with the wickedness of it, and though he had helped, he had always grieved. Love ought to be a warm, friendly, comfortable thing—a glowing hearth, not all the house on fire. Though of course, if you asked him, he knew well enough all the wickedness was due to that James Munk not letting them marry, and keeping Ernie out of the business, so as he hadn't a penny he could call his own. If Ernie and Belle could have married and settled down, there wouldn't have been all this flare up. For he knew Belle, knew her sort, knew that all the trouble was because she wasn't a wife and had been made for nothing else. Of course, Ernley was different: you couldn't say he was made for nothing but a husband. Still, old Ernie would have settled down if he'd been given a chance. Now it was too late—the house of love was burnt, and those who had tried to keep house in it wandered separately, searching for a roof.

§ 2

Batchelors' Hall stands in the flat waste of fields between the Firle downland and the lower Dicker. It looks down on the windings of the Cuckmere through a ragged spinney, remains of the ancient state of trees with which it was once surrounded. Some hundred years ago Batchelors' was still the Manor of the two Dickers, but during the last century it had crumbled from manor to farmhouse, as its estates waned from the holding of two parishes to a few hundred acres of indifferent arable and boggy grass.

To-day it stood unprosperous and untidy, a mere tenant farm, beautiful perhaps to the inexperienced eye, that can ignore fruitfulness run to waste as it feasts on lichened walls, great roof bossed with stone-crop, and those sharp, sinister gables of pre-Tudor imagining, but tragic to those with knowledge to see it as it was, forlorn and rotten, like one of the derelict trees beside the Cuckmere.

To Daniel Sheather the most wonderful part of Batchelors' was its barn, flanking it on the west, and indeed a very cathedral among barns. Its acre of roof flowed red and golden over a hundred beams, supported inside by wooden pillars that made aisles of its vastness. It had the dim, sweet smells of an old church, and a church's queer lights and glooms; it had little warm homely corners, and great arches and aisles and shafts of drifting light, full of mysterious motes, that raked across its darkness, and displayed like altars the piles of oats and hay and linseed, the root-slicer and the straw-rope-twister and other agricultural shrines.

Daniel would have liked always to meet Belle Shackford in the barn, to talk to her there in the homeliness and dimness of it, away from her family, away from her home with its cheapness and decay. But instead, he had to see her in the sitting-room at Batchelors', a room crowded enormously with cheap, modern furniture, the walls papered with a heavily striped black-and-white paper trailed over

with roses. The same paper was in the dining-room, where they always had tea. The Shackfords lived in what they called the "new part" of the building—that is to say, a wing which had been added disastrously in the Regency. Here they had high ceilings and high windows with soaring sashes, instead of the low-beamed ceilings and casement windows that were to be found in the rest of the house. It was far too large for them to inhabit the whole, so they left the old, the essential Batchelors', either empty or full of farmhouse and family stores, and lived in the rooms best adapted to the eldest Miss Shackford's ideas on furniture and household decoration.

The family consisted of a father, three daughters, and a son. Lucy was the eldest, a thin, smart girl, with a mass of carefully, elaborately dressed hair. All the Shackford girls had wonderful heads of hair, but Belle, the next sister, wore hers in untidy tumbling heaps, like a stook of corn half blown over by the wind. Indeed, it must be confessed that the whole appearance of Belle could have been described as untidy and tumbling. She was a big, tall girl, extraordinarily well-developed for her twenty years, with more pretensions to beauty than her sisters, but fewer to elegance. Like all the Miss Shackfords, she was fond of clothes, and spent in finery most of the little money that came her way; but she was reckless in detail. Her skirts hung askew, her blouses gaped, revealing camisoles and chemises in whose integrity the pin had more share than the stitch. Daniel knew Belle's underclothes by sight in a way which embarrassed his modest soul. The two younger children were a rowdy girl of fifteen and a sedate boy a year younger. They had nothing in common except their teens and their derision of those sop-headed males who came to court their sisters.

Daniel approached the house with some diffidence, being uncertain which member of the family he would encounter first. Each would have a different attitude with which to overwhelm him: Lucy would be ladylike and superior, obvi-

ously comparing him to his disadvantage with her own suitor, who was a chemist's assistant in Lewes; Nellie would make noisy fun of him; Tim would make a more deadly sort of quiet fun; and Belle would be just Belle . . . beautiful, blowsy, tragic, sweet, and utterly confounding.

As it happened, he met their father. Fred Shackford was not a bad fellow, though all the neighbourhood said he was a damn bad farmer. He seemed almost to encourage Daniel's courtship; perhaps because he saw that though young Sheather was inferior to young Munk in every point of position, education, breeding, air, and wealth, he was superior in the one point of intention. His intentions were strictly honourable; in other words, strictly practical. He had every intention of marrying Belle and taking her away.

"Hullo, sir," he cried cheerily from the doorstep—"come to tea with the girls? They're just starting."

Daniel came in, breathing hard.

The three Miss Shackfords and their brother were sitting round the table in the dining-room with the black-and-white striped wallpaper. Lucy sat at the head in her best silk blouse, with her hair done a new way. Belle sat on one side in her old woollen jersey, which gaped to display sky-blue silk beneath, and her hair was done in the old way. Daniel shook hands all round, even with hateful Tim and Nellie, and sat down at the table, squeezed between Fred Shackford and Belle.

The conversation was colourlessly polite. It consisted chiefly of remarks about the weather and the pressing of the visitor's appetite. Dan felt as sop-headed as he knew Tim and Nellie thought him. Belle always had this effect upon him—reducing him by her odd, mixed pressure of floppy beauty and keen tragedy to the likeness of a deaf and dumb idiot. She did not have it so much when they were alone—queerly enough he was never so overpoweringly conscious of her when they were alone as when he saw her in the midst of her family. It was when Belle joined with the others in talking to him about the weather,

about the new sheep-dip they were going to try this year, about the prices of hops and wheat, that he found her utterly overwhelming. During the summer and autumn they had had many interviews of terror and intimacy, but these had never embarrassed him in the same way as this light rattling of the conversational counters round the family tea-table.

All the Shackford girls as well as Tim and their father worked on the farm, and their rough toil-worn hands were in startling contrast with their silk blouses, lace collars, and elaborately dressed hair.

"I'm dreading the lambing," said Lucy; "I know what it means, with old Gadgett getting past his work and all. I'll have perhaps half a dozen lambs in the kitchen. My, it's a life!"

"I like lambs in the kitchen," said Belle in her husky voice—"dear little mites! It's a happiness to give them their bottles."

"I'll remember that when the time comes," said Lucy. "I don't say I shouldn't like to see them sucking if I'd time to enjoy it, but I haven't, and that's plain. There's nothing makes you care so little about animals as farming," she remarked as a side-piece of conversation to Dan.

"I reckon there ain't," was his lame reply.

"Oh, I dunno," said Belle. "It isn't the animals I mind, it's the work."

"Animals mean work," said Lucy, "especially when you're like us and can't afford a decent shepherd's pay. We wouldn't keep Gadgett another month if it wasn't that he takes eighteen bob a week, and all the young chaps belong to the Agricultural Labourers' Union, and think they'll work from nine till four, as if a farm was the same as a factory." She tossed her head to finish the sentence.

"Len's getting a bit down in the mouth over Brakey Bottom," ventured Dan.

"Oh, I don't pity a man. I don't see that there's any cause for a man to get low because he has to work hard. But when it comes to girls, it's a shame. Six o'clock I

got up yesterday and in bed at eleven, and to-day up at six again. I tell you my back's aching. And I want to go up to London next week and see my feeonsay's people. They live quite near Westbourne Grove, and always take Upper Circle tickets when they go to the theatre. Oh, I like London, I do."

"I don't," said Belle, with a sidelong glance through the window at the dark flow of the down against the sunset.

"Nor do I," said Shackford, "if it's going to fetch my girls away to theatres. Always gadding these girls are, Mr. Sheather—always after theatres and pictures and shops. All except Belle, that's to say"—remembering his visitor's intentions—"she's more fond of the country, like. But Lucy—she's sometimes in to Eastbourne twice a week for the shops."

"And Belle too, Father," said Lucy hotly, "she came with me both these last times and spent a shilling more than I did. And she hasn't any appearances to keep up like I have—engaged to a young man in good circumstances. I must dress up to my position."

"Hold your tongue," said her father.

The conversation was now showing signs of leaving those rarified levels on which Daniel could not breathe; but just as he was almost beginning to enjoy it, Miss Shackford swept it back on to the heights.

"If everyone's finished," she said icily, "I suggest we all go into the drawing-room and listen to the gramophone."

§ 3

This adjournment was all according to the local rules of courtship, and Daniel had no sense of frustration as he and the Shackford family sat stiffly round the room on the "tapistried suite," while the ancient bell-mouth gramophone gave forth such strains as "The Rag Time Violin" and "Honolulu Lu." The first stages of a wooing were always conducted more or less in public, and he knew that he had

moved forward rather than backward from those solitary meetings in the lane or on the down, when he had pleaded with Belle as Ernley's advocate. The family acknowledged his pretensions by thus surrounding him and entertaining him; he was a suitor publicly proclaimed.

Neither was he conscious of any outrage done to the old walls—to Batchelors' dignity of casement and gable, to the manorial memories of the ancient trees, nodding now against the first stars—by the gimcrack of this new-style farmhouse-parlour, its noisy colours and sounds. His experience held nothing of the quiet old ways, of the old oak and chintz, of the farmer's daughters in ginghams and sunbonnets. Those things he considered rather to belong to the old folk of the cottages, to old Gadgett and others like him, who had not moved with the times. The Shackfords were essentially up-to-date, which did not mean that they were better farmers than their forebears, but that they had somehow brought into the mellow sweetness and rotting dignity of Batchelors the air of strayed townees. One might have imagined the old house longing to spue them and their furniture out of its venerable maw, in which they existed only as foreign, fermenting substance.

Belle alone seemed to have a certain affinity with her surroundings. It might have been because her love of the Lights o' Lewes, of cinemas, and shops, was superficial rather than essential, that she had never craved for them except as means to an end, the end of love, seeking her romance in the lighted mouths of picture palaces and under the dazzle of street lamps, as her grandmothers had sought it in the dark mouths of lanes and under the dazzle of the stars. Belle knew that love was slow-footed in the lanes, but swift on the pavements in the light of the shops. It was up and down those golden pavements of Lewes, under the hanging nimbus of the town's night that she and Ernley Munk had first met and hunted each other. But she had been glad when the hunt passed out into the lanes, and into the sheltered reedy places of the Cuckmere. And now when

the hunt was over, when love had been caught and killed, she no longer wanted to go back into the town; she still preferred the quietness of the fields, the bareness of the downs, the darkness of the reedy places of the Cuckmere.

To-night when at last in a silence of the gramophone, Daniel rose to make reluctant farewells, she surprised him by offering to walk a part of the way home with him up the down. This was not a recognised part of the courtship, and the freedom of the offer made him more doubtful than hopeful of her favour. Her family were surprised too, and not well pleased; they felt such forwardness might drive the suitor away. Poor Belle had always been too much given to freedoms.

"You'd never want to go out now—it's growing dark," said Lucy.

"I've been stuck to the yard all day," said Belle, "and I want a stretch."

She did not wait for out of doors to take it, but stretched herself as she sat there on the piano stool, spreading out her arms and throwing back her head, so that her strong round neck looked like the trunk of a tree with the muscles at its base like roots in the earth and her hair like flying branches.

"Bell!" exclaimed Lucy, and sniggered.

She rose, still stretching, to her feet.

"Come on," she said to Daniel. "If I go now I can get a breath of air before it turns cold."

Daniel made polite farewells all round, during which Belle huddled into one of the men's overcoats hanging in the hall. Her hair was like a pale froth in the dusk as they walked through the yard, and out into the farmhouse lane which led towards the down. Her face was dredged of colour and her eyes no longer held the warm blue sky but the cold moon. Dan felt a little afraid of her, even though he was alone. He wondered whether perhaps she had come with him to give him a message for Ernley, to ask him to carry once more in his unwilling head words of submis-

sion and reconciliation. He had already carried so many, and one more would make too many now.

But she did not speak of Ernley, though after a time they fell into a desultory conversation. It struck him that after all she might have come out with him only because she was tired of the farm, tired of the yard with its endless small toils, tired of the kitchen and the parlour with their crowding and shrillness. She wanted quiet, she wanted coolness, she wanted rest, she wanted room. But she might have had these without his company . . . then perhaps after all she had favoured him by coming with him. It seemed as if he too were a necessary part of her refreshment. He felt his cheeks glow, and he lost the thread of what she was saying; her voice beside him in the twilight was a song without words.

They came to the foot of the steep chalky path which ascends Firle and is known as the Bostal Way. Once no doubt it was a track on the turf of the hillside; now it was sunk deep, into a queer tunnel, which to-night was all black and white with the cast of its own shadows and the gleam of the chalk in the dusk. In the entrance of it Belle paused.

"I won't go any further; I'll turn back here."

She wasn't going to speak of Ernley after all. He reproached himself for having lost any of the sweetness of her company in doubts and surmises. If only she would go a little further with him and let him give himself entirely to the joy of her presence.

"Come up with me to the top of the hill; don't go now."

She shook her head, till her hair was like swimming light.

"No, I must get back now. Lucy ull want me to help with the supper; we have the men staying for it, you know."

She was turning to leave him without handshake or formal farewell. Suddenly he knew he could not let her go till he had tried her.

His hand shot out of the darkness and took hers. He felt it warm and heavy in his; he pulled her to him by it,

and at first, taken by surprise, she came, then began to hold back.

"Belle . . . don't . . . I must."

"No, Dan—oh, no——"

But he had pulled her to him and was holding her against him. He did not dare kiss her, but his body thrilled against hers, content merely to have it close, so that their hearts beat together.

Then suddenly her breathing thickened into a sob, she drooped towards him, seemed to melt into him, and the next thing he knew was that his mouth was holding hers—melting into it; the next that they had suddenly gone separate ways, he uphill and she down.

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

ALL his way across the down, Dan shivered with that kiss. It seemed to have given her to him, without promise, without words. Or rather, it had given him to her; he felt as if till now his courtship had been on wrong lines, as if he had merely sought to win her, and now instead he had given himself. He had given himself to her in that kiss; he belonged to her now, whatever she chose to do with him.

His emotional history was simple. He had never been in love before. During the three years he was in the army he had received a fair amount of attention from girls: he had taken out girls, as his fellow soldiers took them out; he had kissed them occasionally when they seemed to expect it; but he had never felt deeply nor roused deep feelings. He had also—partly from a good disposition, and partly from practical common sense—escaped any of these sordid adventures which the war brought into the experience of so many boys.

But now that kiss seemed to have reversed all his preconceived ideas of courtship, those ideas of the wooing, winning, possessing male. It had made him the servant of love. He saw his life given to Belle, whether she wanted his love or not. Hitherto he had rarely thought of rejection, and if he had thought of it could not have faced it. But that kiss had plunged him into an overwhelming humility.

If he had not been so humble, he would have been triumphant; for he could not think that Belle had not had her full share in that pledge. He could not believe that her lips had been casual or merely affectionate. It was she who

had caused their embrace, their motionless contact, to flame into a kiss. Without her leading he was not sure that he would have dared touch her lips—her cheek, perhaps, but not her lips—the paradise of her sad mouth. . . . In the depths of his humility there was no room for triumph, but there was a dwelling-house for hope.

As he walked over Heighton Hill, facing the last gutter of sunset beyond the Ouse Valley, he thought of Belle as many things. He thought of her as a white owl, flying out of a barn, and drooping against him with tired, ruffled feathers. He thought of her as the lost pigeon he once had found and nursed into warmth between his shirt and his breast. He thought of her as the sea, far down at the mouth of the Ouse, beyond the masts that rise from it like spears —the sea which was so sweet and so rough, whose near shores were home and whose far shores were adventure, who carried men's hopes to sure harbours or swallowed them up alive. He thought of her as the quiet down, ridged with the scars of old battlefields and burying the dead in its heart. He thought of her as an inn, which had given house-room to many before he came and whose last guest had been his dearest friend. . . . He was not jealous of Ernley, any more than a man is jealous of the guests who have been before him at an inn. For he knew that he did not come to Belle as the others had come, as even Ernley had come, as a guest to be entertained, but as the host—to keep the house.

He was glad that he was not going to stop at Bullockdean, but had the extra miles over to Telscombe and Brakey Bottom. He wanted to still his heart with more breaths of the night air before he had to join in the unrest of other lives. Belle . . . Belle Shackford . . . to most men the lovely, tawdry, easy daughter of a failing tenant-farmer; to Ernley Munk the fire that had laid waste two years of his life; to Daniel a frightened owl, a tired pigeon, a sweet and wild adventure, a friendly house. The strange thing was that Daniel knew all about the others, all that she had

been to other men, and yet still hoped for what she could be to him. He knew that he wanted to be to her something that the others had never been, so he was not afraid that she would be to him what she had been to others.

§ 2

Daniel generally had supper once a week at Brakey Bottom. He was the representative of family intercourse, for Tom Sheather was too busy with his own tangled affairs to care to go much into the coil of his son's, and his wife disliked the long, shingley road that wound over the barrenness of Bullock Down and Highdole to the final desert of Brakey Bottom, while Chris and Len were always quarrelling on the ever-fruitful subject of "What did you do in the Great War?"

Dan, on the contrary, loved mixing himself up with other people's affairs, and was equally ready to help Emmy with the housework or give Len advice about the farm.

"Why don't you shack out your fowls in the Pond stubble? It ud do them good, and save you a bob or two in sharps."

"That stubble ought to be ploughed by now," Len would mourn.

"So it ought. But the point is that it ain't. It's stubble. And while it's stubble you may as well shack your fowls in it."

"What I want is a steam plough. No wonder I'm all behind, with the little toy I've got—and the share for ever turning against the stones. It's all stones—this farm; this is the sort of thing they give us ex-service men, and expect us to build a new world out of it. Stones. You could scarcely grow mustard and cress on the Brow fallow, and I can't get decent machinery. The prices are wicked, and I don't care to pay 'em into the pockets of greasy mechanics getting ten quid a week."

"If I was you, I'd do more with stock than grain. The

ground isn't good around here—there's no denying it, but if you had a few beasts——"

"And what am I to do with stock? If I kept sheep I'd have to get a shepherd, and I can't afford his wages. And as for cattle, the farmers have been losing hundreds over cattle this year, thanks to government letting us down. I'd start a milk-round if I was anywhere near a road, but stuck out here. . . ."

Dan would let him grumble on. Len had, in his brother's opinion, been born sorry for himself, and the only thing that ever seemed to make him any happier was a good long cuss. So he seldom tried to argue him out of his troubles, though convinced in his own mind that they were outweighed by his blessings in the shape of wife and children, and though he found their recital tremendously boring, especially this evening when his heart was full of its own matters. He felt relieved when, after having pessimistically considered the cows, shaken their heads over the pigs, sighed over the oats, and given up all hopes of the barley, they left Len's dingy little box of an "office" for the cheerful kitchen, with its leaping fire, flowered window curtains, and the colour and eyes of Emmy, as she sat in a rocking-chair trying to force her daughter Ivy into a clean pinafore.

Emmy was a cheery, buxom, overflowing soul, with warm-coloured cheeks and a mop of red hair. She gave her brother-in-law a hearty kiss, and told him to hold Ivy so that there might be some chance of her being properly dressed before it was time for her to take her clothes off.

"Wriggling like a little worm, she is, and not fit to be seen since she fell on that turkey's egg. Quite spoilt the front of her dress."

"And quite spoilt the egg," said Len, heavily sarcastic.

"Well, she couldn't help it, poor mite, with those turkeys laying all over the place as you might say. She finds it and she says, 'Here's a beautiful egg, Mumma,' and brings it to me for a treat; and then she falls over the dog's chain and her father spanks her."

"Poor Ivy," said Dan. "What luck!"

"I don't mind," said Ivy.

She was a stolid child with a jammy countenance. Neither of Len's children could really be called attractive. Ivy had her mother's moon-face without her animation, and Leslie had his father's inheritance of the le Couteur features, with an added beadiness. But to Daniel they were both charming; he thought them the prettiest, funniest kids he had ever seen, just as he thought Emmy, with her round face and peony cheeks, the prettiest woman—prettier than Belle, though he loved Belle the best. He took Ivy on to his knee, and succeeded after a struggle in tying her pinafore strings, while Leslie tugged at his sleeve and whined for cigarette pictures. Then after he had searched his pockets for four penn'orth of bulleyes he had bought that morning in Lewes, and given two cigarette cards to the rapacious Leslie, they settled down to a game of Snakes and Ladders while supper was preparing—a game in which, after some preliminary contempt, the father was persuaded to join and in which he forget his woes with surprising quickness.

"Now—come to supper, or the tea will be cold!" summoned Emmy.

"One minute," cried her husband, "I'll have won in two more throws, if I don't get on to that damn snake on the last square but one."

"If you get on the snake you're to stop the game. I can't wait while you go back."

Unfortunately, Len got on the snake, and the game of Snakes and Ladders was added to his list of grievances.

"They shouldn't have a snake so close to the end; it isn't fair, having to go back almost from the winning post. Anyhow, I don't think I approve of these games with dice. They teach the children to gamble, and we've got enough of that already in the family."

"Dad doesn't gamble with dice," said Daniel.

"No, he gambles with silly race-horses he don't know anything about. I shouldn't grumble if he was any good at

it, but he can't even give a chap a tip that's worth having. I dropped half a quid over that Selling Plater he told me to back last meeting. Mark my words, Dan, he'll have you all sold up some day or other—what with his bets and his debts to his brewer. Or, he'll have his license taken away for allowing betting on the premises."

"He don't."

"Yes, he does, I tell you. I've seen slips passed over the counter."

"Shush!"

"We're all friends here; you shouldn't let him do it, Dan."

"I've never seen it, and if I had I couldn't stop it."

"It's all very well for you to take it so easy, but if Dad loses his license and gets sold up, I tell you who can't do anything for him, and that's me. It's hard enough to keep my own place going. I sometimes think I'll chuck it up and take up fishing."

"Fishing!" cried Emmy and Dan together.

"Yes; I might go into partnership over a trawler if I could put up the money. After all, we've got the sea on both sides of the family. Have you ever thought you'd like to go back to Mother's people and take up that sort of life? Sometimes I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to hook it from this damn country and go back to Sark."

"Oh, Len!" cried Emmy, "you'd never."

"Why not? Reckon we'd do better for ourselves over there, and sometimes I think I'd sooner be there than here. I can remember it a bit . . . rocks, and fog-horns for ever moaning. . . . Can you remember it, Dan?"

"Not I! Leastways, I remember a lobster's claw I had to play with, if that's remembering."

"A lobster's claw! What a thing to give a child," cried Emmy.

"I want a lobster's claw," said Ivy.

"I want a lobster's claw," shrieked Leslie, and the conversation was swept into an orgy of scolding and pacification.

It might not have struck anyone that Len's and Emmy's

household was a particularly good advertisement for matrimony, but Daniel seldom left it without an earnest desire to get married and have an Ivy and Leslie of his own. At first this wish had been dim and general, a cloud that might settle anywhere, but now it had definitely fallen on Belle Shackford. He would like to see Belle sitting at his supper-table when he came home for an evening; he would like to see her undressing his children, as he had seen Emmy undress Ivy and Leslie to-night. Of course the domestic picture was a little blurred by the fact that for the first years of married life he and Belle would have to live at the George and bear with its intrusions on their privacy and romance. Still, they would have their own room—two rooms perhaps, for there was seldom any call to house travellers at night—which would seem all the more private and their own because of the family and tavern life surging outside. In his mind as he walked home was a picture of candle-light moving over low beams, Belle's face lifted into it, her hair streaming back into the darkness of the bed, as he stood looking down on her with the candle in his hand. . . . It was a marvellously clear picture, the only one his imagination held as yet of the intimate joys of marriage, and it brought a strange fog of tears into his eyes.

He reached home in time to persuade the mate and master of a Newhaven trawler that it would be wisdom to leave the bar before the carrier's 'bus went townwards for the last time. Dan had a good persuasive way with drunks, and seldom had occasion to use more than his tongue, though he was ready enough with hand and knee when the situation really demanded it. "I never saw anyone run out a chap more neat than Daniel Sheather" was the verdict of the ploughman of Upper Barndean.

When he had helped his father tidy the place and lock up, he was free to go to bed. His bedroom was a primitive matter, for of his own choice he still slept in his childhood's little room, hoping that the larger ones might entice guests and raise the George from mere tavern level. He slept

under the droop of the George's eaves—outside a far view towards the downs that make the Gate of Lewes, inside a cot-bed, a chest of drawers with a jug and basin upon it, and one or two hooks on the wall. To-night there was nothing either outside or in to distract him from his rapid business of undressing and getting into bed. He had worked hard, he had walked many miles, his lungs were full of the open air, so in spite of the excitement thrilling at his heart he fell quickly asleep. All that remained of that kiss at the foot of the Bostal Way was a dim dream of candle-light moving over the ceiling of a low-raftered room.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE worst of having a secret is that, if you are of a friendly, communicative nature, it never lets you rest till you have told it to somebody, and then it is no longer a secret. Daniel wanted badly both to tell his secret and keep it, to eat his cake and have it. He nearly told his mother when he unexpectedly met her going downstairs the next morning. He had a queer feeling of treachery towards her, as if she would have hated to see another woman set up in the place she had never attempted to fill.

He put his arms round her neck and kissed her.

"What's the matter with you, Dan?"

"I dunno."

"You're like a great baby."

"I'm only saying good-morning."

"That's a new way for you to say it."

"I'm sorry—I can't help it, Mum."

He took away his arms from her, and went out.

It was his "early day" at the Rectory. One of Mr. Marchbanks' many peculiarities as a clergyman was his fondness for having services without any congregation. Every morning the little rasping bell of Bullockdean Church made a short clamour at seven, and the village priest stood before the village altar while the village yawned and pulled on its trousers and lit its fires. Apparently, the thing could not be done if Mr. Marchbanks was quite alone, so three or four of the local youths took turns to kneel beside him in the cold morning shadows and answer for Bullockdean. By a process of the survival of the fittest, three mornings out of the seven had fallen to Daniel's share; afterwards he would have breakfast at the Rectory and do one or two jobs about the place before going home.

To-day he was a little flurried over his duties. In church he stammered and gabbled, and forgot his "piece"; and at the Parsonage he burnt the boiled eggs, which as everybody knows is an achievement usually beyond the reach of the worst cook. The lady who "helped" at the Rectory was often late, and Daniel was used to cooking the breakfast as well as eating it. He was, as he put it, "fond of messing about," and certainly did not as a rule produce a worse meal than Mrs. Ades herself. But this morning he was demoralised, and not only brought an incinerated breakfast to the table, but ate it heedlessly, without comment or grimace. His friend could see that something was on his mind and very near his tongue.

"Mr. Marchbanks, have you ever been to Batchelors' Hall?"

"No never, but I've met Shackford on one or two occasions."

"Ever met the girls—Lucy and—er . . . Belle?"

"I met Belle once out walking with young Munk, and he introduced me. But I haven't seen her since."

"Oh, then you'd . . ." Dan's cheeks and tongue were burning. "I say . . ."

"Well?"

"What would you say if . . . I mean, how would you like to keep a pig?"

The clergyman looked startled. Was this the fruit of Dan's soul in travail?

"I shouldn't like it at all."

"I'd take care of him for you, and you could feed him on scraps and waste . . . or get a sow and mate her, and we'd make money out of the litters."

In spite of various efforts on Mr. Marchbanks' side and several temptations on his own, he stuck to pigs till the end of breakfast.

Even by then the "help" had not arrived, and Dan, who could never quite see where a man's work ended and a woman's began, proceeded to a frenzied washing up and an

unceremonious making of the Priest's bed by pulling down the blankets. He was smoothing the quilt over his handiwork when a ring came at the front door bell.

Dan thundered downstairs to open it, and found Jess Harman on the step, with Dr. Penny's twins in a push-cart beside her.

"Hullo, Dan! I didn't expect to see *you*."

"Mrs. Ades hasn't come and I'm doing her work."

Jess, who had as pleasant a smile as her sister Maudie, grinned widely in derision.

"I reckon you are. I reckon you've smashed the plates——"

"I haven't!"

"And just pulled down the cover over the bed and thought you'd made it."

Dan blushed guiltily.

"And have you emptied the slops?"

"No."

"D'you think they'll empty themselves? or d'you expect the poor man to empty them? Go on—you're a fine housemaid."

"Is it why you've called—to tell me that?" asked Dan, saucily.

"No—I've got a message for the Rector from Mrs. Penny. She says 'May she put off the carving class from Tuesday to Wednesday as her cook wants to change her night out?'—a verdible answer—'yes or no.'"

"I'll give it," said Dan, turning into the house, "and then maybe you'll come and help me with the work, since you're so smart."

"And what's to become of the kids? I'm hired to look after them."

"Bring them in, and we'll find something to keep 'em quiet. Let me help you with the pram."

Jess wanted only a little persuasion, and the twins were brought into the kitchen, while Dan went off to the study with Mrs. Penny's message.

"It's 'yes,' " he cried, as he came back. "He says she may go to hell if she likes."

"I'm sure he never said anything of the kind."

"Didn't say it, but he meant it. He doesn't care when she has her old damn class."

"Dan, what's the matter with you? You're getting beyond yourself."

It was his secret again, tormenting him in a new way. It had already made him sentimental, then embarrassed; now it made him uproarious. He took the boy-twin out of his pram and tossed him up and down in his strong arms.

"Daniel—a-done do—or I'll go at once. You'll hurt him; he's getting frightened."

"Not he! He's loving it."

The entertainment certainly appeared successful. Young Michael Penny yelled with delight, and his sister Lois yelled with her lust for the same experience. Daniel shouted with laughter and Jess scolded him at the top of her voice. The Parsonage rang with noise—the scream of children's voices, the roar of a man's, the scold of a woman's—in his study, the Parson put his fingers to his ears and wondered why there were so many people in the house and what they were doing.

At last the clamour subsided, as the twins, tossed into gratification and only just not into sickness, were given the cat to play with, while Daniel and Jess turned to the house's need. Dan did not go out, as he had first intended—his secret still tormented him, and he longed to tell it to Jess. So he followed her about with brooms and pails and dusters, submitting every now and then to being told he was in the way and worse than the twins for getting under her feet.

Daniel had known Jess Harman all her life, which was a couple of years shorter than his. He and the two Harmans had gone to school together, and had shared many secrets about frogs and toffee and the private life of Jess and Maudie's joint doll. Daniel had been jeered at by the other boys and his elder brother Len for liking to play with girls, but though in time he had realised his own ignominy and

withdrawn to more manly spheres, he had always been fond of the sisters, and on their leaving school the friendship had been resumed, with the greater self-consciousness of adolescence. Dan had actually fancied himself in love with Maudie for a couple of months—that was just after she had become barmaid at the Crown and wore her hair in two great half moons each side of her face and was considered rather a smasher by the local youth. He had never fancied himself in love with Jess, whose career had been a lowlier one in pantries and sculleries, but to-day he certainly did experience an overwhelming desire to tell her about Belle Shackford.

"Jess," he asked, "have you ever been in love?"

"Have you been following me round the house on purpose to ask me that?"

"Yes—oh, Jess, I'm in love myself."

She turned round and faced him, dust-pan in hand.

"You! Daniel Sheather! Who with?"

"Belle Shackford," he said hoarsely.

"Well!"

Jess threw her hands in the air, unheeding of the avalanche that descended from the dust-pan. "Well!"

"Well, why not?"

He was angry now. He had told his secret, and wished he hadn't.

"Well, my boy, she's been engaged to Ernley Munk for two years, and anyhow she ain't the girl for you."

"How d'you mean?"

"She ain't your sort. She's fast. You want something quieter."

"She's quiet enough for me."

He thought of her for a moment as the pigeon in his breast.

"She's—oh, I don't want to miscall her, Danny, for I reckon she's had her troubles, but you know she's fast. You know the things that have been said about her as well as I do."

"I don't care."

"But you don't believe they ain't true?"

"I don't care if they're true or not."

"Then there's some hope for you. If you'd said to me that Belle was just like the female in 'be thou hard as ice and chaste as snow thou shalt not escape camomile,' then I'd think you were just a poor loon that had to be protected. But if you're going into things with your eyes open——"

"I am."

"And how far have you gone?"

"No way at all."

Since she was being so unsympathetic, he would not tell her about the kiss.

"Then don't go any further."

"I've gone too far to turn back."

"You say you've gone no way at all and yet you've gone too far to turn back. You *are* a loon, after all, Daniel."

"There's no good talking to you about it," he said sulkily. "I'm sorry I told you."

She melted at once.

"Oh, don't say that, Dan. I didn't mean to be short with you, but I was sorry to think of you . . . well, never mind. I wish you happy, I'm sure, though I don't expect it."

"Why not?"

"Because—well, I've told you before, and you didn't like it, so there's no sense telling you again. Besides, most likely, if she's not the sort of girl for you, she'll see it herself and say 'no.' And don't think I shan't be sorry for you, though I say it'll be better if she does. I've nothing against her myself, but I shouldn't be acting friendly if I didn't tell you solemn that she's not the girl for you."

"Then who is she the girl for?"

"Oh, a more dashing sort of chap—the kind that'll take her riding in the side-car of his motor-bike and give her tea at a hotel in Eastbourne, and ull dance with her sometimes, and buy her garters—a chap like Ernie Munk. All the Shackford girls are like that—fond of pleasure. 'She that

liveth for pleasure is dead while she liveth,' the Bible says."

"Now don't start preaching."

"I ain't. But there's no harm in you knowing what the Bible says about Belle Shackford."

"And about you too. You go to the pictures every time you get a chance."

"Which is about once a year. Howsumever, I don't say I shouldn't go oftener if I could. Now, Daniel, you and me had better stop quarrelling, and go down and see if those kids haven't baked theirselves in the oven or cut theirselves open with the kitchen knives or otherways lost me my place."

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

AT Batchelors' Hall, Belle Shackford lay on her bed. She was tired. All the morning she had worked in the house and in the yard, cooking and dusting, feeding and milking. They were short-handed to-day, for her father had gone early to Lewes for market, taking Tim with him, and the day's care had fallen entirely on the three girls with the couple of elderly farm-hands. Belle did not as a rule get tired easily, but to-day she was worn out—not only in body but in mind. Her body ached with moving, bending, stretching, and turning, and her mind was sick of pails and mops and brooms, of straw and milk and snouts and beaks. She was done.

Her room was a tall, narrow slat in the "new part," partitioned off the hugeness of a Georgian best-bedroom, and looking out into the tops of Batchelors' trees. The walls were bright with her clothes hung on them; she had no cupboard, only here and there a bit of curtain, from under which sprayed out the greens and mauves and blues of her attire—crumpled muslins of summer's wear, frayed jerseys of this winter, bits of silk and lace in want of mending, blouses hung by an armhole, chemises hung by a shoulder-strap, knickers striding the peg with dangling frills, hats like flowery nests, and hats like flaming wheels. She had a great many clothes; more signs of them protruded in coloured tongues from the three drawers of her washstand, where a silver-mounted scent-spray stood beside the cracked white earthenware of her common use.

As she lay stretched full length on the bed, a woman's magazine crumpled under her body, her face hid in the

pillow, Belle knew why she was tired. She was tired as a woman starved must always be tired. For more than a month now she had gone hungry—and it seemed a year.

She could not believe that it was only a month since she had seen Ernley. His going was like a death, a loss which time makes heavier rather than easier, for with the days the emptiness grows. It is true that for the last six months their friendship had been disruptive: he had been moody, remorseful, doubtful; she had been jealous, frantic, and wearying. It had not been the kind of affair she wanted, though it was with the man she wanted. Perhaps that was the very reason why. It had been easy enough to have these adventures with men whom she did not want, men who were only the vessels of love, without personality, without being, save in so far as they brought her those rapturous dark moments which from her first tasting them had been the immortal ichor of her life. But Ernley had brought her something more: he had brought her himself, and her quarrel with him had been because he had not given her himself, but only those moments, which now, without himself, were not enough.

When she had first met him and known that he would never be like the others, she had felt sure that he would give her what he promised. His circumstances seemed to point to settlement and quiet possession. But she was soon to discover that his circumstances were treacherous and that he was their slave. His father would not hear of the marriage—he planned better things than Belle Shackford for the Crown—and without his father Ernley was penniless and tradeless, adrift in the great over-crowded market of post-war England, with the poison he had breathed in Flanders still infecting his body and his mind. They must wait—for something, anything, nothing—and at first Belle had been content, not knowing how much of Ernley would remain ungiven. But the content could not last. They both wanted too much of each other. She reproached him for weakness, he accused her of distrust; she was jealous of

him so much away from her, he resented her jealousy. There were quarrels, reconciliations. The stocky figure of Daniel Sheather was seen tramping over the down between Bullockdean and Batchelors' Hall. . . . Then more Daniel, less Ernley . . . more and more Daniel, less and less Ernley . . . and now all Daniel and no Ernley.

She began to cry as she thought of Dan. Pity melted the ice of her grief. Poor Dan who was so sure of her, when he ought to be sure of nothing but his own disappointment. Did he really think she was so easily and so quickly to be comforted? She was conscious of a faint thrill of anger against him in the midst of her pity—anger for his stupidity, for his groundless assurance, as maddening in its way as Ernley's groundless doubts, for his imagining that she would ever deign to become part of the household furniture of the George . . . though, after all, why not? People who were not good enough for the Crown usually went to the George, so Dan was only acting upon precedent. The Crown had turned poor penniless, lovely, careless Belle Shackford out of doors, and it would not perhaps be so stupid of her to cross the road to where the meaner inn stood open and lighted to welcome her.

Dan might have been wise in rushing his courtship into her first month of desolation. A few months later he might have found her hardened, indifferent to shelter—and, if he had known it, it was in his promise of comfort and shelter that his only hope lay. He was so different from Ernley that nothing about him would ever remind her of the lost days. To be loved by him would be like seeking forgetfulness in a new country, and that was what she wanted more than everything—forgetfulness. After all he could give her much that was sweet. She remembered his kiss at the foot of the Bostal Way—the boy's shy lips quickening against her own. He would be a good lover, and he would give her besides a tenderness, a protecting care, that Ernley had never given.

But she wrenched her mind from the thought, not so much

out of her surviving love for Ernley as out of her almost maternal compassion for Dan. Poor little soul! Poor little presumptuous ass! She must not hurt him, by giving him love as hard cash in exchange for protection and oblivion. She must not seek comfort at his expense. She had no right to have given him that kiss—she would have given it to any man who had been kind to her, to any man who was young and comely and tender-hearted, but he would never know that. He was probably thrilling with it now. Poor baby!

Belle sat up on her bed and thrust back the hair from her face. One piece of practical action lay before her, with the promise of such relief as practical action brings. She must get rid of Daniel. She must send him marching—in common fairness. Though susceptible, easy, careless of her own dignity, Belle was no devourer of men. The men she had known hitherto had wanted the same sort of things as herself, and she had felt no special responsibility towards them. But here was a man who wanted something different—or rather, who wanted from her what she could give only to another man. She could not bear to hurt him. She liked him. Belle liked all men.

In spite of many sad experiences, she still liked them, though the manner of her liking had changed. When she had known men only from books and hearsay, she had pictured them as strong, aloof, rather majestic beings, on a plane above the frailties and reactions of her femininity. The woman's paper which her inert body had crushed for the last hour, was full of print and pictures of strong silent men in heather-mixture tweeds, with jutting chins and bulldog pipes hanging from their clenched teeth—pictures of masculine magnanimity, honour, truthfulness, and protection. And such till the end of her 'teens she had imagined them, and had lived through some bitter years while her idol was in process of being shattered by experience. Yet out of the smash there had risen a fresh reconstruction of the masculine image, as of a being frail, erratic, sensitive, perverse,

unreliable, helpless, and as such calling for more of the maternal quality of her love than any of those broken idols of tweed and iron. It was out of this infinite pity, bought of experience in exchange for respect, that she resolved to send Daniel away.

§ 2

Primed with this resolution she went down to tea—a twilight tea, for the Shackfords must be economical with their lamps—a tea with the cloth a white stare in the grey dimness of the room, and the cups and saucers all soft spots and gleams and the high, uncurtained window a great pool of grey light.

Her father and brother were back, tired and hungry and unsuccessful.

"Not a colt you could buy," said Shackford, "except at ruination price. We must hang on with Queen and Swaddy a bit longer for the plough. They'll take us through another year, anyway."

"I hate to see these poor old horses work," said Belle.

"But I tell you there was nothing we could buy—not half a dozen possible colts in the market, and they all at impossible prices. One of you girls should marry a millionaire, and then we could buy a motor plough, and do without horses."

"Guess who we saw in Lewes to-day," said Timothy in his sedate, old-man's voice.

"Edgar," guessed Lucy, with a glance at her pearl-set engagement ring.

"No, he wasn't yours," said Tim, "he was one of Belle's."

"How 'one of mine'?" cried Belle.

"Well, he was your last but one, Ernley Munk."

"Oh! . . ."

"What was he doing?" asked Lucy.

"He was taking out his new girl," said Tim owlishly.

"His new girl! You don't mean to say he's got a new girl so quick?"

"Well, Belle's got a new boy; why shouldn't Ernie Munk have a new girl?"

"I haven't got a new boy," cried Belle fiercely.

"Oh, no, of course not—my mistake; Daniel Sheather comes to see me and Nell."

"Now don't let's have any of your sauce."

"Sauce . . . sauce?" queried Tim.

Belle half rose in her seat, then sat down again. She saw the wisdom of agreeing with her adversary while she was still in the way of getting information out of him. She wiped her mouth and tried to speak steadily.

"I can't help Dan Sheather coming to see me. I don't encourage him. Did you see Ernley, Father? Who had he got?"

"I don't know who she was, but she was a stepper—silk stockings and fur coat and everything. They were having lunch at the White Hart."

"And he called her 'Kid,' " said Timothy. "I heard him."

"Oh, I think he's consoled himself right enough," said Shackford, feeling that the occasion might be helpful in dispelling any surviving hankerings after her old lover that might survive in his daughter's breast.

"He was holding her foot between his under the table—I saw him," piped Tim.

"You seem to have seen and heard a lot," snapped Belle.

"I always do," the child retorted blandly.

"Did you speak to him, Dad? Did he tell you who she was?"

"Yes, we had a word about the weather; and he introduced me to Miss Pearl Jenner. He said he was taking her down to Bullockdean in his side-car to spend the evening."

A gesture of defiance on Ernley's part?

"Sounds as if they were going to get married," said Lucy.

"I don't say they'll get married; he never was the chap for settling down. But you could see he was gone on the girl. And my! she was a corker; you should have seen her nails shine!"

Belle rose from the table. She felt sick—physically sick with physical jealousy and physical humiliation. The thought of Ernley entertaining that girl at the White Hart. . . . It was at the White Hart that she and Ernley had met and found paradise before they found it in the dark réedy places of the Cuckmere. They used to have lunch, with wine. . . . She felt the fierce sweet taste of the wine upon her lips, mixed with the taste of cigarettes and Ernie's kisses. . . . And now perhaps this girl, this stepper, this smasher, in her fur coat and silk stockings, with her silk ankle held between Ernie's under the table—this unknown female, better looking, better dressed, and better loved than Belle Shackford—perhaps she now had that dry, sweet, smoky taste upon her lips—cold, yet burning. . . .

Belle was in the passage, tearing one of the milk and manure smelling overcoats off the pegs, wrapping herself in it and going out. She wanted air—breath——or she would be ill. She walked quickly across the yard, splashing recklessly into the pools that lay between the cobblestones, though they gleamed their warning in the light of the dusk. Her breast was seething with the alchemy of love and hate. She had never felt it before—this hate, this jealousy—shaking her, burning her.

She wanted to kill Ernley; she wanted to kill that dim, mocking figure of the girl her mind had dressed up. He was taking her home—to where he had never taken Belle—to his own home, his fireside. He would marry her—she would have him for ever—him, the real Ernie, whom passion alone could not give. . . . She could not bear it. . . . She was sobbing—screaming. She must go in somewhere and hide her shame.

Half way down the farm-drive, an old cow-house stood open and empty. Belle went blindly in, and sank down on the floor. Bowing herself into a hoop, she sobbed and sobbed, first tearlessly and then with tears that scalded her face and blinded her eyes, and finally exhausted her into motionless silence.

§ 3

About an hour later, her mind bled of all thought, and her heart bled of all feeling, she walked feebly back into the yard, huddling the overcoat round her and shivering. She had only physical sensations left.

A lighted patch gleamed in the house, and suddenly her sister Nellie filled it, calling from the doorway.

"Come on, Belle—come on. Where have you been? Your young man says he can't wait any longer."

Her young man. Daniel Sheather.

Lucy stood in the passage.

"Here she is," she called through the drawing-room door. Then to Belle: "Do take off that awful old coat. What are you thinking of? You can't go in like that. It smells of cow-dung."

Belle slid the coat from her shoulders and hung it up. Then she went into the drawing-room. For a moment she stood in the door, swaying a little on her muddy feet. Her skirt was muddied at the hem and torn in two places, and in taking off her coat she had pulled her jersey off one shoulder, which gleamed large and golden in the lamplight.

Daniel, who was sitting at the far end of the room, sprang up and came towards her.

"Oh, Belle, I was so afraid you wouldn't come in before I had to go. I promised I'd be back early to-night—but I had to come over to—to——"

The words poured out of him, then dried as he saw her close. "Belle, dear, what's the matter? Has anything happened? Are you ill?"

"No, Dan, only—only . . . I've been out walking, and slipped in the dark."

She tried to finish the sentence in every-day words with an every-day voice, but though she managed the words, the voice failed her. She said "slipped in the dark" in the voice of a terrified child.

"My poor little Belle."

His arms spread out maternally, and before she could grow up again they were round her. He rocked her to him, and in the sudden comfort of him her stiffness melted, her body relaxed, and her heart began to feel again. It was at first a feeling of sheer dependence, of the huddling love of a child against the parent's breast; she thrust her head into the warm hollow of his shoulder, and shivered like a child.

"Oh, Danny, save me—such dreadful thoughts . . . of Ernley. . . . Help me to forget him. I never hated him before. . . . I'm afrightened. Oh, I can't bear it alone."

"You shan't bear it alone," he murmured. "I'll take care of you, lovely one. I will, I will. You'll be all mine and I'll take care of you. You'll be all mine, won't you, Belle?"

She had forgotten the promise she had made to herself and to him as she lay on her bed upstairs. That ghastly hour of hatred and physical jealousy, turning for the first time her tragedy into horror, seemed to have mown down her life like a scythe. She was starting afresh, in a bare field, unimpeded by old resolutions. All she knew was that she must have comfort, tenderness, and protection, and that, surprisingly, little Dan Sheather could give them to her. She knew that she must have honour and truth to restore her self-respect and the respect of her family, who had guessed her humiliation. She knew that she must have some armour against Ernley's wounding, or, after perhaps a few more blows, he would wound her to death.

"Daniel," she cried. "Danny, save me."

He promised that he would, though he did not yet know from what or from whom.

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

IT had all happened as in her heart she had expected. Her surrender had broken her life in two, and the fiery city of her love for Ernley and the bleak wilderness of its frustration lay beyond a gulf. She neither loved him nor hated him, nor was she any longer jealous of the girl who now had his kisses. She could face the prospect of meeting him —perhaps meeting them both—in the inevitable future. Neither had she, curiously enough, any feelings of triumph or self-vindication towards him or towards her family. She was not proud of her engagement to Daniel Sheather, any more than one is proud of the bed on which one finds rest at the end of a weary day.

At first she was conscious of little except relief and peace. Those experiences which might have disquieted her had now no power to shake the lethargy of her being. The day after her promise, Dan brought her over to Bullockdean to show his parents. She saw the contempt flickering in the younger brother's eyes, she felt the occasional sting of the mother's tongue, but neither could rouse her from her quiet leaning against Daniel. She liked his father, too, who had Daniel's face, with sea-blue eyes in it; there was nothing sharp nor contemptuous about him, and she saw in him without offence the naïve admiration of the male for her big charms.

Of course, if she would consent to live at the George and help with its management, they could be married almost at once—there was a room, probably a couple of rooms, to spare, and she would be useful in the house and in the bar, and so earn her keep. On the other hand, if she refused,

their marriage was as indefinite as hers and Ernley's had ever seemed; Daniel would have to hunt the blue lion of the ex-service man—a job, and having found it would have to contrive, perhaps for some years, to make a living out of it himself before he attempted to support her on it too.

He scarcely seemed to doubt that she would be willing to live at the George, but she refused to make any promises. If the past were cut off from her by a gulf, the future was wrapped from her in a mist. It was essential to her new-found calm that she should not try to search it. If she had to think of the future, new doubts and new cares would arise. To-day she could look out unmoved from the shabby windows of the George's bar, and see across the road the windows of the Crown behind their snug red curtains. But could she feel sure that she would always be able to do this? She would never even ask herself the question. When the future came she would face it, but till it came she would not bring it any nearer, either with questions or with promises.

"It's too soon to think of marrying now. I want to get used to—to this first, Daniel."

He looked at her with his slow, spreading smile, which became mixed with a little reproach when it reached his eyes.

"Oh, Belle! . . . oh, dearie!"

"We haven't been engaged a week, and before we settled to get married we'd have to think of ever so many things. And I don't want to think of anything just yet, Daniel."

Her voice trembled a little, and his compassion was immediate.

"Very well, darling; then you shan't. You shan't ever; I'll do all the thinking for you. Not that I was ever such a valiant chap for brains, but I can think of ordinary things."

She knew that this courtship was moving on lines exactly opposite to the old one. Then she had been the one anxious to marry, and Ernley the one contented to drift. But probably the reasons had been the same—she had wanted to marry

Ernley for the same reason that Daniel wanted to marry her —because she was not sure. She knew that, in spite of her promises, Daniel was not sure of her, and sometimes a dreadful compassion smote her. He was so sweet, so kind, so innocent; she must never make him the victim of her needs, she must never let him suffer because of her. Whatever she felt, whatever her awakening, he must not be hurt. She had sacrificed him once to her own urgencies, and it was her task to see that she did not sacrifice him again, though she realised vaguely that he was the kind of man whom women will always sacrifice, either to themselves or to other men.

§ 2

In spite of occasional qualms, those days of late February were happy enough. Belle found Dan's love-making a sweeter experience than she had expected: she had expected to find him common and unpracticed, challenging contrast with Ernley every hour; she had expected to find herself a cold slag-heap of burnt-out emotions. She was surprised to find that the spark in her was not dead, and that the word and touch of love had power to fan it once more into flame. She saw that Daniel would be able to give her what other men besides Ernley had given, the things which do not really matter and yet are so sweet. He could give her the exquisite moments she loved, and because he was not Ernley, she could forget herself in these, and be happy, and not wish for anything more that he could not give.

Hence she was, in a manner of speaking, happier than in the days of her love for Ernley. Dan was a much more restful lover, though he showed occasionally an ardour that surprised her. There was really as much of affection as of passion in his wooing. It delighted him to cherish her, to button her coat and tie her scarf, to rub her hands when they were cold. . . . And she, in the new joy of being looked after, could forgive him much that sometimes jarred—ways that weren't the ways of Ernley, the ways of the Crown, but

the common ways of the George, reminding her that she was stooping to her refuge. . . .

Of course, Ted Shackford was only a tenant-farmer, and his daughters worked hard in house and barn—but they wore silk, and when their young men took them out they expected the best seats at the pictures and to be fed at hotels and cafés. Ernley had been an especial adept at this taking out. In the side-car of his motor-cycle Belle had ridden like a queen, to hotels and theatres and picture palaces, in Eastbourne, Lewes, Newhaven, and Brighton. She had driven home with great beribboned chocolate boxes on her knees, or bunches of expensive flowers. Her sisters and friends had envied her. They did not envy her now, though they thought Dan was well enough in his way, and were glad that Belle should marry respectably before she came a cropper.

Daniel never took her anywhere, except upon the broad back of the down, to the hollows by White Lion pond, or to the five haystacks standing against the sky beyond Barndean. Here they would sit on his spread coat, huddling together for warmth, he kissing and fondling her, smoking innumerable woodbines, and talking plain country talk of birds and animals and paths and people. Nearly all their love-making took place out of doors. Neither Batchelors nor the George was quite congenial. If it had not been so cold, Belle would have asked for nothing better. As it was, she sometimes wondered why he never suggested a picture palace.

Beyond his family, she had so far met none of his friends in Bullockdean. She shrank from meeting people whom she knew thought no good of her. The Harmans, the Pilbeams, the Ponts, everybody, thought of poor Belle Shackford as trash. If socially she was stooping to Daniel, in every other way he was stooping to her. She was a girl of no character: the clack of two parishes, chiefly, but not only, in connection with young Munk. She knew that some people said she was a bad lot, and most that she was no better than she should be. She didn't try to justify herself

against these criticisms, but she sometimes wondered if the women who judged her could ever have felt as she felt, or surely they would have understood. Were there women who went through life cold, calm, and sedate—unmoved, untempted, unshaken? She wondered.

§ 3

Circumstances had combined to prevent a meeting between her and Ernley. Almost directly she had given her promise to Dan, Ernley had gone off to visit an uncle in Streatham. Belle had at first wondered if this were mere circumstance, but Daniel had assured her that old Ernie had been planning this visit for weeks, and he had expected him to make it just about now.

"You wouldn't mind meeting old Ernie again—would you, Belle?"

"No, of course not."

She spoke the truth. Her calm still remained unbroken. Indeed, it was growing, thickening in the comfortable atmosphere of Dan's affection. She was a more placid creature than she had ever been before.

Directly Ernley came back to the Crown, Daniel put him the same question.

"You won't mind meeting Belle again, will you, Ernie?"

"Of course not, you silly fool. Why the devil should I now?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I was only asking. I was thinking of having Belle over to spend a night or two next week. Maybe you could come to supper."

"I'd be pleased. Why should you think I'd mind meeting her? Does she mind meeting me?"

"Oh, dear no. She said she'd be glad."

"That's all right, then. The past's forgotten, the hatchet's buried. Have a drink."

Dan felt infinitely relieved. Having seen so much of Belle and Ernie in the last destructive days of their love, he

had found it difficult to believe that they could ever meet like ordinary human beings, though each had found, as they say, consolation elsewhere.

"How are you getting on with Pearl?" he asked.

"Oh, fine. Couldn't be better. We had a day together in town while I was at Streatham."

"Are you going to marry her?"

Ernie flushed.

"How can I tell? It depends on what Dad thinks of it. He's seen her once. I brought her over here, and he likes her. But I dunno. I don't think I'm the sort of chap to get married. Not but that I'm sure to do it some day. I'll make a damn bad husband to some poor girl."

"That's what you say. I don't think so."

"Because you don't know half what a moody, broody sort of devil I am. I hate domestic life too—cookery books and babies and all that. You love that sort of thing, so you're wise to get married. When is it to be?"

"I dunno. We haven't settled yet. It all depends whether Belle ull live at the George."

"You never thought of having her to live at the George?"

"Well, where else are we to live? If I have to leave home and get a job, we can't get married for years."

"But you couldn't have her at the George. It ud be impossible. She'd never cotton to that kind of life—all mixed up with your family."

"Well, she's lived all mixed up with her own, and they're not so good as mine. And if you'd married her she'd have lived all mixed up with yours."

"I've only got Dad—and Lord! it's very different here. . . . But I'd better not be offensive. Belle knows how to look after herself—damn well she does! Not much putting up with unnecessary evils about Belle."

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

IN spite of the professed readiness of the parties to meet each other, it was not till a fortnight later that the meeting took place. First it had been obstructed by Ernley's wish to bring his new girl, who was not available during the first week, and then by an unexpected reluctance on the part of Belle.

"But, sweetheart Belle, you said you didn't mind meeting him."

"And no more I do. Only I don't want to just yet."

"But you'll have to do it some day—may as well do it now."

She held out her arms to him suddenly.

"Oh, Daniel, I'm so happy; don't let me go."

"Let you go, lovey? That I won't!"

He took her in his arms, and she felt his warm, gentle embrace drawing her close, till the throbbing of his heart was under hers.

"Daniel, I want to stay where I am—not go further, I mean. I'm so happy here."

Her words were nothing to him but the echo of his own happiness in their embrace.

"Sweetheart . . . I'd like to hold you always. Belle, my arms are round you always, even though you don't see 'em."

She gave way about meeting Ernley. After all, she must do so some time, and to feel herself, in spite of all, unready, made her afraid—made her deny her own unwillingness by acceptance. As for the added sharpness of his bringing his new girl, that might make the dose more efficacious, and she must get used to that too as much as to the other . . . every day—all her life . . . only the road between them.

When the evening came, and Daniel fetched her over from Batchelors' Hall, he was disappointed to find that she was not looking her best. He too was inclined to resent the inclusion of Ernley's girl, and his aim was to show her the woman she had supplanted as in every way a finer woman than herself. But for the last two or three days Belle had looked tired and off-colour. Her brightness seemed to have faded, her bigness seemed to have sagged, and Daniel, who admired brightness and bigness, was sorry, not for his own sake, but for hers.

Possibly, to a taste less naïve than his, Belle was improved by her paler looks. The ebbing of her brave colour seemed to have left her features more delicately graven, and the dimming of her eyes had given them a provoking, shadowed look. She wore a yellow frock the colour of her hair.

"Your body's undone at the back," was Kitty Sheather's greeting to her future daughter-in-law.

Dan, who had reluctantly contemplated Belle's blue silk camisole on every occasion of precedence due to a lady, but had been too shy to mention it, felt relieved at his mother's remark, though he could have wished it made more graciously.

Belle grabbed at her back, pulling her bodice, which straightway burst on the shoulder. Kitty giggled, and it seemed to Dan as if his darling's blue eyes swam a little. His mother didn't offer to help her, and moved by tenderness he was no longer shy.

"Let me help you fasten up."

He was just going to embark for the first time on the pathetic masculine struggle with hook and eye, when Kitty indignantly pushed him aside.

"How dare you! I always think you a modest boy. I won't have such things in my house—no!"

She had Belle tidy only just as the others arrived. They came in looking, perhaps by contrast, the picture of orderliness and ease. Ernie wore a blue lounge suit that made Daniel, also in a blue lounge suit, lose faith in the Gents'

Outfitters who had provided it. Ernley's girl, Miss Jenner, was hall-marked Eastbourne, and evidently made Belle feel the same as Ernley had made Dan, though personally he didn't think much of her plain black frock and little black hat in comparison with Belle's yellow finery.

Supper was laid in the parlour at the back of the bar. It was a very superior supper, almost dinner in fact, with a couple of fowls and a treacle sponge. The drinks had been surreptitiously bought at the Crown, Tom having decided at the last moment that his bondmaster's ale was not good enough for his guests. Dan, who had made the purchase under a vow of secrecy from Maudie Harman, suspected that Ernley guessed what had happened. He knew that the George was tied to Messrs. Hobday & Hitch and that Messrs. Bass's number One was not to be found locally except in the cellars of the Crown. In vain Dan laboured to keep the bottles out of sight. . . . Not that he minded old Ernie knowing, any more than he minded him having a blue lounge suit that really fitted him; but he did not want Miss Jenner to think that Belle had fallen socially . . . though, of course, she had . . . marrying the George after being engaged to the Crown. . . .

Dear lovely thing! As he watched her he thrilled with pride and tenderness. She was beautiful, her dress was beautiful, even though the bunch of silk flowers at her waist was a little crushed, and she was always pulling them up and flouncing them out a bit. She had more scent than Miss Jenner, too; it came to him in generous waves right across the table, whereas Miss Jenner's only rose faintly from beside him. He didn't really like scent much, still if girls used it he'd like Belle's to be stronger than anyone else's . . . and she'd made her nails shine too, like the others. They were even brighter, though her hands were very different, being large and work-worn instead of small and white. Miss Jenner did not have to work at all, nor did her father, she told them—he was private, having retired some years ago from the building trade.

The conversation on the whole lacked spirit. No one knew whether Ernley and his girl were engaged, therefore how far it was permissible to go in raillery, and neither said anything by way of enlightment. They talked a little about the rates, about the need of remaking the road on the east side of the valley, about a recent meet of the Southdown hunt of Beddingham, about the new motor 'buses on the roads. Miss Jenner was very polite to Belle, admired her dress, told her about a very good shop for hats in Eastbourne, and asked her if she ever went to dance at the Grand Hotel. Belle, except in answer to such questions, scarcely spoke, nor did she eat much. She sat heavy and lovely and silent, the lamp drenching her in gold.

After supper they had a table for whist—that is to say, Kitty and Ernley played Christopher and Miss Jenner, while Tom Sheather served in the bar. Dan and Belle sat and watched the whist players, side by side on the sofa, he with his arm round her waist, as he was privileged to sit in public now they were engaged.

§ 2

"That's a fine girl Munk has got," said Chris, when the guests had departed, and Belle had gone to help Kitty wash up in the scullery.

"Not so bad," said Tom Sheather.

Dan swelled in silence.

"A lot of style," commented Chris.

"Oh, yes—a lot of style. But I don't think she comes up to our Belle."

Chris said nothing—insultingly.

"You've got the best girl, Daniel," continued his father, "and I bet young Munk sees it. I could see him staring at her all through supper. I expect he's sorry he changed, but I reckon Belle isn't. Hey, Daniel?"

He smote his son between the shoulders, and Dan felt loving and grateful towards him, though he still wished the family differently grouped in its alliances.

Kitty also had something to say on the subject of Munk's girl.

"She's quite the lady—you can see that. Never done any work."

"Ladies work," said Dan sullenly; "look at Mrs. Penny. I've seen her washing her own curtains.

Kitty sniffed.

"I dare say. I know Mrs. Penny's sort of lady. A real lady never put her hand to anything. Dr. le Hellé's wife in Guernsey she sit in her drawing-room all day, and ring the bell if she drop her handkerchief. Give me that sort of lady."

"Well, don't give her to me, that's all."

"Oh, indeed, Mister Impertinence! That is the way you speak to your mother when she is going to sit in the kitchen so that you and your young woman can sit in the parlour. I have half a mind to go to bed, and then you two cannot stay alone downstairs—no!"

"I'm sorry, Mum. But I can't bear to hear everybody except Dad getting at Belle."

"Who's been getting at her? Not I. I have nothing to say against Belle if she will be a good girl. When I spoke of a lady I did not speak of her for you. No lady would marry a common boy."

Holding his tongue with difficulty on the subject of common boys, Dan walked out of the kitchen and into the parlour, where he found Belle sitting under the lamp.

"Are you tired, sweetheart?"

"A little—only a little."

"You shouldn't ought to have washed up. Why didn't you tell Mother you were tired?"

Belle said nothing. She rose slowly and came towards Daniel as he sat on the sofa. She put her arms about him and hid her face in his shoulder.

"My lovely, my dear." He strained her to his heart.

She did not want him to speak, she wanted just to lie heavy against him, at rest in the homely comfort of his arms,

but his tongue, oiled by more generous liquor than he was accustomed to, ran on.

"Oh, darling, it's so lovely to think that I've got you here with me at home to-night. That you're not going away. It's almost like the time when I'll have you here always. Oh, say that time ull come soon."

She did not speak, but he did not seem to want her assurance in words but in kisses. He stooped his head to hers as it lay on his breast, the bright rough gold all teased over his shoulder. She found herself giving her usual response, or rather her response coming from her ungiven, feeling apart from will.

"If you can only put up with this place for a bit," he ran on, "I reckon it won't be long before we get one of our own. With you to help, I'm sure mother ud give teas, and maybe let rooms, even. Then she wouldn't want any of the money that I earn, and we could put it by. And I know Dad ud help us if ever he got the chance. It's not much I'm offering you, Belle, but I do feel as I could make you happy if you let me try."

"I know you could, Danny—but——"

"Oh, say you'll let me try. If you won't come here, reckon we can't get married for months and years. And, oh, lovely Belle, I want you so. I want you terrible—here, as I have you now. I want you and me alone together. Oh, Belle, say you'll let me try."

"And suppose you fail."

She lifted her head from his shoulder and looked him suddenly in the eyes.

"And suppose you fail."

"Fail!" He seemed startled by the new thought. "I shan't fail. I can't fail. I love you too much. And, Belle, you do love me—you've said you love me—oh, you still love me? Say it again."

"I do love you, Danny dear; you know it, but——"

"Then why won't you let me try? Why won't you marry me at Easter and come and live here? I know it's not what

I should ought to be offering you, but it really won't be so bad. We'll have a couple of rooms of our own, and I'll see as you don't do anything but what a lady ud be willing to put her hand to in her house. We'll keep quite private to ourselves a lot of the time. Oh, Belle, you don't have such an easy life at Batchelors that you need worry about coming here. This ull be a rest to you after Batchelors, and Mother ull be good to you, I swear she will. Her tongue's sharp like that to everyone, and Dad he thinks no end of you and ull treat you kinder than your own. And I—oh, lovely Belle, I'll be so good to you. I'll stand between you and everything that's rough; I'll take care of you as if you was my child. Belle, you shall be my child and my queen if only you'll be my wife."

The Crown's ale had given him a new and surprising eloquence. Belle was moved by it. She had never before had him so fluent, so shaken. As she looked into his pleading face it was almost as if its Saxon bluntness of feature was lost in the brilliance of his brown French eyes. This was a Daniel of another, more fiery race, stirred into life by the emotion of this hour.

After all, he had only said what was true when he had argued that she would, other considerations apart, be happier at the George than at Batchelors' Hall. Her mother-in-law's tongue was not much sharper than her sister Lucy's. She liked kind Tom Sheather; she need not see much of Ernley. . . . And she would have Dan always with her, dear Dan, who was so strong and sturdy and comfortable, and so surprisingly, amazingly sweet . . . always with her . . . never alone with her fears. . . . Too late for her doubts . . . the future had come upon her. She must meet it—surrender to it. She could not turn and flee, she could not disappoint him, who had already saved her from so much.

"Belle—let me try."

She turned her face once more to his shoulder, and gave her consent in silence, while his incoherent words of gratitude stormed at her ears.

§ 3

For the first half of the night Belle slept heavily, according to her nature. But towards morning she began to dream —queer confused dreams of the supper table and Ernley's face. . . . She heard Ernley saying again and again, "Let me try," and awoke to remember it was Daniel who had said it. She awoke in this way several times, and at last could not fall asleep again. She lay on her back staring at the ceiling which seemed so near after the ceiling of her room at Batchelors' Hall. A queer light hung over it, the starlight reflected in her mirror and then cast upwards to the beams.

She must think now—she could not help it. She must think of Daniel and Ernley—Daniel to whom she had promised herself and Ernley to whom she belonged. It was dreadful, it was humbling to realise that in spite of all that had happened, all that she had done to break her chains, she still belonged to Ernley; yet such was the situation as she saw it in the clearness of the wakeful small hours. She saw too that her complete surrender to Daniel, her promise to marry him at Easter, was almost entirely due to her growing realisation that her heart was still Ernley's. Twice she had known the full vitality of her surviving love for Ernley—when she had heard he loved another woman, and this last night; and each time the knowledge had driven her a definite step towards Daniel. But for the first, she would never have become engaged to him; but for the second, she would not have promised to marry him next month.

Was this fair to him? Of course it wasn't; but she really could not help it. The more she realised what she had lost in Ernley the more imperative it became that she must take what she could get in Daniel. The more she realised the superiority of the Crown, the more her only chance of happiness seemed to lie in her finding a home at the George. If she had not got Daniel, she would be down and out. She was not the sort of woman who can say "the best or nothing" —she was not so fortunate as that. She must have some-

thing, somebody to fill a little of the emptiness which had come into her life when she lost her only chance of the best.

Of course, it wasn't fair to Daniel. Poor Danny. . . . He loved her. She was quite sure of his devotion, and tragically he was quite sure of hers. He had sometimes been doubtful and deprecating before their engagement, but ever since he had taken her surprisingly for granted. Well, then, he had only himself to thank if he was made the victim of her desperate need. After all, it was rather cool of him to imagine that she would look at him after Ernley—so soon after Ernley. He had changed his part of vicarious wooer to that of actual wooer without apparently one qualm of diffidence. It served him right to be taken at his word, instead of being sent packing, as would have happened with most women. He had offered her comfort and oblivion; she would take them, and let him face the consequences of his own offering.

Probably the consequences would not be so very serious. He was thick enough not to guess much that would be passing in her mind; she could no doubt make him happy enough —anyhow far happier than he would be without her. . . . If only she could get rid of this queer sense of kinship she had with Ernley—a kinship quite apart from breeding, education, and manners—which would still have existed if Ernley had been the son of the George and Daniel the son of the Crown. It was part of a feeling that Ernley's life, opinions, happiness, surroundings, mattered to her intensely, whereas Dan's did not. All that mattered to her about Dan was his love, his kisses, his protection, all, in fact, of herself that was in him.

These thoughts carried her through into the morning. The window-square became a chilly sullen blue, the outlines of the furniture began to appear among clouds of shadow. A photograph of Daniel, which he had given her in the first week of their engagement, stood on the little table by her bed, beside her candlestick. She had brought it with her from Batchelors' Hall, knowing that he would be pleased

at such a token of attachment. It was not a good photograph: it was a portrait he had had taken soon after he joined up in '16. There he sat, looking very stiff and upright, with his swagger-stick across his knees, his eyes black and bolting under his service-cap, which was set at the conventionally rakish angle. He seemed to stare at her through the gathering light. . . . What a typical little soldier he looked—just a little ordinary swaddy such as she had seen in thousands marching through Lewes, singing "It's a long, long trail" or "Sussex by the Sea." . . . But she was a beast to think of him like that. He was not an ordinary little soldier: he was a kind, devoted, patient, young lover, whose only crime lay in giving her more than she could receive. Even if he knew what was passing in her mind, he would not reproach her: he would be humble enough to take the crumbs of Ernley's feast. All he wanted was, indeed, to be of service—to be her dog. In taking from him so much and giving him so little, she was not, all things considered, using him so ill.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

THE next morning it was Dan's turn to be Bullockdean at the village altar, and having tried in vain to force an extra day's representation on Freddie Pont or Tommy Pilbeam, he resolved not to disappoint Mr. Marchbanks, but to sacrifice five minutes of Belle's society. It was not likely to be more, as he expected her to take advantage of her absence from home, by having a good rest in bed. But by seven o'clock Belle was tired of her thoughts and of the hard places of the George's best bed, so she rose, dressed, and came downstairs into a silent and chilly darkness.

The blinds were all down, for the Sheathers were not at their best early risers, and this morning they were tired after their dissipations. Belle opened the door, which Daniel had left on the latch, and walked out. The street was full of the pale March sunshine, and the tossing March wind. The signs of the George and the Crown swung creakingly to and fro. Belle stared up at the blind face of the Crown. The street was empty, the village seemed asleep, except for the columns of smoke that the wind spun, scattering them every now and then in wood-scented clouds that swept down from the roofs and mixed with the pale sunshine in the street.

Belle knew where Daniel had gone, and walked up the church lane in hopes of meeting him. There were, in spite of his simplicity, one or two things in him that she could not understand. She wondered if he was religious; she thought not, for he never spoke of it. But he was a good boy; that she knew. He had always been good, even during the difficult days of the war, and unlike many good people,

he had always been kind. . . . Oh, she must not let him suffer! He must never suffer because of his sweetness, his generosity, his daring towards her.

She had come to the churchyard gate, and would not go any further. The lane had by now reached a level above the rest of the village, and from where she stood, she was looking down on the Crown garden. It was a fine big place, plentifully studded with arbours, which in summer would give shade to tea-drinking couples. Dan wanted the George to "give teas," and thought perhaps it would do so when Belle was there to help. But there wasn't room for two inns of that sort in the same little village—the George would simply smash once it went into deliberate competition with the Crown. That was another of Dan's silly ideas: he ought to see that the George's only chance was to keep its own common ways. His father had better sense than he.

A man had come out of a shed in the Crown garden, and was walking towards the house. She knew immediately, by his figure and his walk, that he was Ernley. Her breath thickened, and suddenly she felt almost faint, and clung to a stake in the hedgerow for support. Good Lord! what was happening to her, if she could not bear even the distant sight of Ernley? Every effort she made at her own reassurance seemed only to land her further in doubt. What would become of her?

"Belle—darling! This is a fine surprise."

Daniel had come through the gate while she stood lost in her new weakness. He put his cold cheek to hers, and she found her usual comfort.

"Oh, Danny, I'm so glad to see you."

"And I to see you, sweetheart. I never thought you'd be out so early."

"I woke up early."

"Didn't you sleep well, dearie? Weren't you comfortable? I know most of our beds are full of lumps."

"Oh, I was right enough. But I felt wide-awake, and I'm not used to lying long."

"Belle, must you go home to-day? Can't you stay till to-morrow? I seem to have had so little of you."

"I must go, I reckon. We're short-handed as it is. But you'll be coming over soon."

"I'll walk over with you to-day, but I'd sooner have you here."

He stopped and drew her to him in the last shelter of the lane.

As he released her he seemed to notice something.

"Darling, are you well? You're looking terrible pale."

"Oh, I'm right enough."

"But you shouldn't ought to have come out like this before breakfast, on an empty stomach."

"And what about yours?"

"Oh, I'm used to it. I'm tough. But you—you just about want someone to take care of you."

He kissed her fiercely—without shelter.

"Oh, Danny—don't. Not out here in the street."

She had a sudden fear that Ernley would see.

"There ain't nobody about."

"But someone might be looking out of a window."

He saw her eyes slant upwards to the windows of the Crown.

"Don't you worry about old Ernie. It ud do him good to see us."

She was seized with a strange fury at his insensitiveness. Her heart beat wildly, and for the first time she nearly gave him bitter words. But she managed to force herself to silence, and they went into the George together. Breakfast was laid in the kitchen—a substantial meal, richly various for a man who could not pay his brewer.

"Good morning, Mum—good morning, Dad. Here we are—here's Belle. Reckon she's dying for her breakfast, same as I am."

Dan's cheerful voice seemed to fill the room, or rather to fill all of it that was not filled by the voices of Kitty and Tom and Chris. Perversely, Belle herself felt unable to

speak a word. Having shut her mouth on bitterness, she seemed unable to open it again for friendliness or greeting. She sat down beside Dan at the table; sausages appeared before her, bread and butter, and a great cup of tea.

"My, Belle! but you're looking ornery!"

Tom Sheather's voice came down the table, bellowing. . . she saw Dan cutting more bread. . . .she felt just as she had felt when she was watching Ernley in the Crown garden . . . almost faint . . . quite faint . . . sick . . . dead sick. . . . She went suddenly in a huddle to the floor.

§ 2

The next thing that she became conscious of was a pair of eyes, looking down at her. They were dark eyes like Daniel's, yet not Daniel's, and they seemed to be boring down into hers, reading the inmost secrets of her heart, secrets of which even she herself was unaware. Then slowly a face surrounded them, and she realised that she was lying with her head on Kitty Sheather's knee, looking up into her face.

She stirred uneasily, and moaned.

"Belle . . . Belle . . ."

The agonised voice came from beside her, and with a slight roll of her head she looked into Daniel's face, convulsed and pitying.

"Oh, my darling—my poor darling. . . . Don't be frightened, sweet—you're better now. Here's Dad with some brandy."

Tom Sheather held a flask to her lips. She drank it, gulped, and sat up. For a moment the room seemed to go round, then steadied itself again. She gripped Daniel's arm and laughed weakly.

"I fainted."

"You're tired, my precious—you've been working too hard, and you shouldn't ought to have got up so early. Now you shall go back to bed and stay there till you're rested."

"No—I must go home."

The words were out of her almost before she realised her own urgency.

"But you can't possibly; it ud be wicked for you to go when you're tired and ill like this."

"I must go; I'm quite well now."

She had scrambled to her feet, and stood swaying and clutching him by the shoulder.

"Don't be silly, my dear," said Tom Sheather; "we'd have it on our conscience if you went home to-day."

"But I must—I must. I tell you I can't stay——" her need seemed to grow in desperation every minute—"Danny can drive me—you've got a trap. Please, please, Danny, take me home."

The clear voice of Kitty Sheather broke into the discussion.

"Let her go if she want to; there's nothing the matter with her."

"Oh, Mum! How can you speak so? Look how white she is. Is it natural for a girl to faint at her breakfast?"

"Yes," said Kitty coolly, "sometimes quite natural."

Belle walked towards the door, waving back Daniel when he tried to follow.

"You go and get out the trap. Please don't come, please don't keep me."

She managed to hold back her tears till she was out of the room. She was aware of some sort of argument going on behind the closed door, but Daniel did not come out to her, as she had feared. No doubt his mother's notions of propriety forbade his helping her with her packing. To her great relief, Kitty did not come either. She was left alone. She felt quite well again now, but she could not stop crying. Her tears fell on her clothes as she folded them and put them in her bag. When she had finished packing, she had to wait a few minutes till they had ceased.

At last she was ready and had come downstairs in her coat of purple frieze, with her sky-blue tam-o'shanter

crammed down over her hair which she had not troubled to brush out of its recent confusion. Dan was waiting for her with the trap, miserable, but resigned. Her farewells were said—defensively to Chris, gratefully to Tom, nervously to Kitty—and she was up in the trap beside Daniel, driving down Bullockdean street under the staring windows of the Crown.

"How are you feeling, dear?" he asked her every moment, and when they were out of the village he wanted to put his arm round her. Almost without knowing what she did, she pushed him away.

"Don't, Danny, you mustn't do that; you can't drive with only one arm. Please get me home quickly—quickly."

§ 3

When they came to Batchelors' Hall, she would not let him stay. He wanted to go indoors with her and explain to her family that she was ill, and must rest. But she would not let him. She gave him on the doorstep an almost sacrificial kiss, and stood watching him drive through the gate before she went in.

Daniel was bewildered, not only by the last hour but by all the events of the morning. He was bewildered by Belle's illness, still more by his mother's indifference in the face of such a calamity, and most of all by Belle's new strange aloofness, refusing his comfort when most she seemed to need it. As a rule, in her blooming health, he had always found her eager to lean on him, but now when she was ill, faint, and tired, she seemed to turn away. He was distressed.

These sad thoughts occupied him all the way home, but when he reached the George they were immediately dispelled, not by any comfort, but by a fresh piece of catastrophe.

"What you think's happened?" cried Kitty from the open door as he drove up.

"I dunno—anything good?"

"Good! *I* shouldn't call it good, but I never know what you think."

She was evidently more moved than by poor Belle's afflictions.

"Well, then, what is it, Mum?"

"James Munk—old Munk—he's dead."

Daniel gaped.

"He was knocked down and killed in Lewes this morning," put in Tom Sheather over his wife's shoulder. "A car got him as he stepped off the pavement. This very morning it was—he's just been brought home."

"And now Ernley will have the Crown and get married at once," said Kitty.

Dan still found himself speechless. James Munk had continually maddened him and scared him with his bitter gifts of tongue; but to be dead—to be swept suddenly out of life in the familiar High Street of Lewes, among all the traps and cars and people and driven beasts. . . . he felt the back of his throat thicken with the beginnings of a sob, and hastily whipping up Spot, he drove round to the backyard, where he could be unmanly if he wished.

All that day nothing else was talked of in Bullockdean. Maudie Harman answered a continual stream of inquiries in the bar, and by common consent almost nothing but sherry was ordered, sherry being for some obscure reason considered locally as the only suitable drink in the presence of death.

Dan did not go over to the Crown. He did not know what to say to Ernley. He did not know what Ernley was feeling—whether he too felt all the pathos and horror of death like that in Lewes Street, or whether he was only thinking that now he was free, master of the Crown and of himself, or perhaps wondering what would have happened if his freedom had come earlier, when he was still Belle Shackford's lover. . . . He had never credited Ernley with any strong feelings for his father, and he knew he wasn't the kind of man to speak as he didn't feel. He would not

speak of James Munk in the way Daniel was accustomed to hear speak of the dead, and something in young Sheather's country heart was shocked at the idea, and would not let him go where there was a chance of good ways being set at naught.

At the George there was also plenty of talk, but it was in the right tradition. Neither Kitty nor Tom had had a good word to say for Munk while he was alive, but they had nothing but good to say of him now he was dead.

"Poor chap!" said Tom. "I saw him drive away soon after you did, Daniel—wearing his grey suit. . . . It seems terrible, don't it? I'd just come up from the cellar with some of the stout, and I heard wheels and I thought 'that can't be Dan come back—no, it's from the Crown'—and that very moment James Munk drove past the winder."

"Was Ernley with him?"

"No, he was alone, but he'd got a crate or something at the back of the trap. If I'd known what was going to happen, I'd have looked more particular."

Tom sighed regretfully. The next minute he changed the subject.

"But here we are in such a terrification about poor Munk who's dead that we've forgotten our Belle who's living. I hope you left her feeling better, Daniel."

"Yes, I think she was better, Dad. She said she was; she wouldn't let me come in."

"Well, I hope she won't go working herself to death at that place. That's what's the matter with her, you mark my words. Shackford can't afford a proper lot of men, so he works his girls to death. Poor soul! It made my heart bleed to see her looking so ordinary."

"It was nothing," said Kitty, "only a little morning sickness."

Something in her voice and in her look, as well as something vaguely suggestive and familiar about her words, made Daniel start and turn suddenly hot.

"What d'you mean, Mum?"

"Only that I think you'll soon have another of Ernley's cast-offs to take over."

She was standing near the door, and went out as she spoke. Dan remained, gaping at his father.

"Come, lad, don't take on," pleaded Tom. "Reckon Mum didn't mean what she said."

But Daniel was no longer there.

§ 4

The news of James Munk's death came to Batchelors' Hall almost as quickly as it had come to Bullockdean. Fred Shackford brought it back from Lewes, and had it all ready to retail to his girls at dinner.

"He'd left his trap at the White Hart, and was just going to cross the road to Mr. Vine's shop, when, as he stepped off the pavement, a car got him. A private car it was, driven by a gentleman from Guildford. Lord! they were upset; the lady in the back seat fainted right away. No one was to blame, they say—car going quite slow and on its proper side—only old Munk stepped off without looking around. I didn't see it happen—didn't get up in time, but I saw some of the blood."

"Was he alone?" asked Lucy. "Wasn't Ernley with him?"

"No. He was quite alone, but of course everyone knew who he was. I heard it was Munk before I got anywhere near."

"Ernley ull be able to get married now."

"So he will, and he'll be a bit of a catch, too. I hear the Crown's worth something these days."

"Mr. Munk wanted him to marry a lady. He thought he could, with the education he'd given him, and he being an officer in the war. I wonder if the girl he's got now is a lady."

"She looked one. But by this time it don't matter. He can marry whom he chooses. Poor old Munk can't stop him."

Belle said nothing till dinner was over, then she went up to her room. She did not cry or make any sound, but in her heart was a twisting, strangling despair.

Ernley was free. He could marry anybody he chose. He could marry Pearl Jenner in her refined black frock, with her Eastbourne accent and her Private father. He could have married Belle if only James Munk had died a little earlier, or if only she had been patient a little longer. He had always meant to marry her some day, either when he had found a job or his father had relented. Belle had told herself—and unfortunately him—that if he really loved her he would not wait, but would marry her at once, and they would face poverty together. He had assured her in return that he did love her, but that for her own sake as well as his he would not marry her without maintenance or independence. She had not believed him, and they had quarrelled—many times—and been reconciled—many times. And now, after the last quarrel, she had refused reconciliation, and instead had pledged herself to a man who was ready to marry her without maintenance or independence. Whereas, if she had waited only a few more weeks she could have had Ernley and both.

That was the sort of trick you had played on you when you were bad. Maybe if she had been good all this would never have happened. Good people would say she had got what she deserved. Perhaps they were right. After all, she ought to have understood. . . . Men don't love women the way women love men. Ernley had not wanted of her all that she wanted of him, so he had been happy and satisfied without marriage. He had been happy because he did not want so much. She had made too many demands on him. . . . She had been like the daughter of the horseleech saying "give-give." She had said: "It isn't enough that you've given me your friendship and so much joy; I want everything you've got, your home, your family, your daily life, your leisure. Give—give!"

She had asked for so much that she had got nothing. She

saw that she hadn't got even Daniel now. She could not marry Daniel now that she knew she carried Ernley's child. To her spirit's long recoil had now been added the recoil of the flesh—and the thing was impossible. She carried Ernley himself in her body. She could not give even so much as her body to Daniel.

She felt neither joy nor sorrow, only a deadly fear. It seemed a long time now that she had felt this fear, but it had been only faint, half-realised, a vague sickness. Now it had shape and name. Kitty Sheather's boring eyes had given it both. She knew now what for long she had suspected, and she knew too that her suspicions had been more vigorous than she would acknowledge at the time. She had thrust them from her with hasty reassurances, born of ignorance out of desperation. But they, more than any bodily condition, had been responsible for her ill-health, and now that they were no longer thrust aside, but an admitted part of her stress, she felt curiously well. It was her bodily health alone that enabled her to face the future. Her mind was sick. She saw herself friendless, kicked out by her family, and bound by all the strange contrariety of nature to refuse the only help that could come to her, from Daniel. She saw herself exposed and forsaken. She saw her love for Ernley made immortal, looking up at her with undying eyes of torment.

§ 5

She was in the midst of these thoughts, sitting on her bed, when Lucy stuck her head in at the door, saying:

"Daniel's come."

Well, that did not really make it any worse; on the contrary, the sooner she was through with it all, the better. She rose, and without troubling about her appearance, went downstairs. He was in the drawing-room, comparing details of the Munk tragedy with her father. She was anxious to get him away, but Shackford was full of the garrulity of

almost-an-eye-witness, and it was some time before he had done with the relative positions of the White Hart and the car and the body and Mr. Vine's shop. Daniel seemed anxious to be off too—she saw him try to break away more than once—but it was nearly ten minutes before the farmer remembered the afternoon's milking and reluctantly went out.

Belle did not feel secure in the drawing-room, and asked him to come out of doors. He protested for her sake, as a light drizzle was falling, and it ended in their going together into the big barn. They had its vastness to themselves, and there seemed something vaguely terrible about its size to-day, for the light of the drizzling afternoon was only feebly spread among its shadows. Daniel had often dreamed of loving Belle under the mighty wing of its darkness, but now he felt almost afraid. Here was neither darkness nor light, but a grey dusk woven of the tears of the day, and though he was alone with Belle, he could not speak, for his intense pity for her had made him fear her, as he had never feared her before.

She spoke first, and her words were like a knife, cutting right down into the wound of his fear. She had no pity for him; her one thought was to do his business quickly, so that she could turn to her own.

"Daniel, it's no good. I can't go on with it."

"With what, Belle?"

"Our engagement—our marriage."

He began to stammer.

"B-but, darling—that's—that's what I came over about. I—I wanted to tell you it makes no difference . . . even if it's true. . . . I—I don't mind—I love you just the same."

"That isn't what I mean. I mean that it's I who—I can't go on with it. I'm sorry, Daniel—I know I should ought to have done this long ago—or better still, I shouldn't ever have let you love me. It's my fault. But I can't help it. I can't marry you now that I know. . . . Do you guess what I know?"

"Yes, Mum guessed. But, Belle, it makes no difference. . . ."

She brushed his protest aside.

"I'm going to have Ernley's child. I can't marry you when I know that."

"But, lovey, I don't mind—I swear I don't. And it only makes it the more necessary I should marry you—quick. Then folk can't talk so—or anyway their talk won't hurt you."

"I can't help their talk. I'd rather they talked. . . . I can't help it. I can't marry you now I know this."

He began to look scared. At first he had put her words down to her humility, and he had thought them words of renunciation, but now he was half-guessing their true significance. Here was something altogether terrifying and incomprehensible.

"Belle, sweetheart—you mustn't talk so. You just about must marry me now, or you'll be done for—ruined. Oh, darling, don't think I'll ever miscall you for this, or fail you; and I'll be kind to the kiddy, I swear I will. I'll love it as if it was mine."

His generosity almost reached her pity, but pity came too late now. The instinct which dragged her from him was stronger than any emotion which pulled her towards him. All that could do was to soften her words a little.

"Poor Daniel. I'm unaccountable sorry. I know I'm treating you badly, but I can't help it. I wish I could explain it all, but I can't. Oh, can't you understand? If I was to marry you I'd feel I was doing something wicked—committing adultery. Oh, I know I've done wicked things before, and you'll think I'm silly to mind now. But this is different somehow. If I married you, I'd feel I was doing worse than any other thing I've done. Oh, Daniel, do try and understand."

Perhaps he was hardly to be blamed if he couldn't.

"But, Belle, didn't you love me all those times when you

said you did? . . . You must have loved me when I held you in my arms, and you came so close, and you gave me all my kisses back. . . ."

"I know. I loved to be in your arms and feel you taking care of me, but things are different now. I couldn't bear you to kiss me. . . ."

His face suddenly went dark.

"Then you can't really have loved me, or you wouldn't change—even now . . . when things are different. Belle, I believe that you loved Ernley all the time."

"Maybe I did. I must have, though I didn't know it."

"Then you've played the harlot to me. You've taken me in. You've given me your kisses for what you could get. . . ."

He stopped suddenly, for he could just see her face in the faint light, and her eyes were pools of fear and pain. Even though he guessed that neither was on his account, he must pity her. He realised all that she had set before herself by this refusal of his protection, now in this last moment of her extremity. He could not believe that Ernley, probably engaged to another girl, would turn to her again. Without Ernley, without Daniel, she would have to face shame, friendlessness, poverty, and pain. Something very strong, very terrible must be driving her, even though he couldn't understand it.

"Forgive me, dear. I shouldn't ought to speak so. I'll believe that you were honest with me, though I can't understand you now."

"Oh, Dan, I was honest, as far as I knew my heart."

"But, what do you mean to do about it if you don't marry me? I reckon Ernley's engaged to Miss Jenner, and you can't do . . . have . . . go through this without being married."

"I can—I must——" setting her teeth—"I will."

He relented absolutely.

"Since you won't have me, let me tell Ernley what's hap-

pened. He'd never let you face it without him. . . . Reckon he'll chuck that girl. . . . Anyways he should ought to provide for you."

"Daniel, promise me—swear to me—you won't breathe a word to Ernley. I won't be beholden to his pity. If you tell him, I—I'll kill myself."

He was more bewildered than ever.

"Promise me, Daniel," she repeated hoarsely, and he promised—shaken in heart and head.

The conversation seemed to have withered. They stood in the darkness, staring at each other. Voices sounded in the yard, coming from the cow-house, and suddenly both were taken with the same fear—that they should be found here together, and be given the teasing due to lovers in the dark.

"Get out, Daniel," cried Belle—"out by the cart-shed door."

"But you'll let me see you again? Belle—I can't bear this."

"No—don't come again—not just now. Oh, don't you see it's no good? I'll never change my mind. I'm finished."

"But you can't . . ."

"Yes, I can. Get out, damn you! If you don't go now, I'll never see you again as long as I live."

"If I go now, will you see me?"

He was like a child pleading.

"Yes—yes. Some day—next week. But get out, anyway. I'm off."

With a sudden swooping gesture she blundered like a white owl through the darkness to the main door of the barn. He heard her calling her father's, her sister's name—making truce with the invader, in order to escape more easily from him, her sweetheart and servant.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

THE rest of that day was like a bad dream, and the next, and the next. Dan felt broken by all that had happened, and bewildered by his conflict of pain. He did not know which he felt worse—Belle's pain or his own. Sometimes the worst thing in life seemed to be the thought of her alone, disillusioned and friendless, on the eve of losing her last of reputation, her last of a home—of having to face the supreme ordeal of any woman's life without help or hope. The fact that this was due to her own deliberate choice did not make it more endurable—on the contrary. Her isolation seemed to be all the greater because his arms were outstretched to hold her, if only she would turn his way. At other times he would be completely beaten down by the sense of his own loss, of his own shame. He would also tell himself that he must have failed her in some mysterious way—that it was impossible to believe she had not loved him once—she had weighed him and found him wanting. Thus his two griefs, for her and for himself, would sometimes be brought together in an all-enveloping regret.

He said nothing to his family about what had happened. A new shamefaced reserve was upon him. He could not bear that they should know what had happened to him or what was going to happen to Belle. Also in his heart, giving a fiery quality to his suffering, was the torment of hope, the feeling that Belle must change, relent towards him and towards herself. Then these days would be but a dreadful interlude, better secret, and so forgotten.

Of course, the Sheathers knew that something was amiss. Dan's was not one of those natures which can carry on its

fundamental activities in private, giving the neighbours a surface decoy. His travail was noticeable in his looks, voice, behaviour, and appetite. But its causes were misjudged. His family attributed his anguish simply to his knowledge of Belle's condition. Apparently there were limits to his assumption of Ernley's cast-off property. Kitty was glad to see the boy show so much spirit.

"Maybe he have the spunk—you call it—not to marry her after all."

"I hope the boy's got too good a heart for that," said Tom.

"Too good a heart! You call it good heart to disgrace his family by marrying rubbish."

"Come, come, my dear. You shouldn't ought to speak like that of poor Belle. Reckon it ain't the match we'd have chosen, but then it ain't our part to choose, neither."

"Ho! that's the way you manage these things, you English. You say to the boys and girls, 'You choose each other' and never mind what the fathers and mothers think."

"Well, what about yourself, ma'am? Reckon if you'd gone by what your family said, you'd never have married me."

"My father he like you very well, and as for Eugene and Philip, they are only my brothers. I do not ask my brothers."

"You're meaning that you'd never have married me if your Dad hadn't given his consent?"

"Certainly, I never marry without his consent. But your boy he never so much as ask yours, and he marry a girl who have no character and already belong to a friend of his. Now she will have a child too soon after they are married, and the neighbours will say unkind things, whoever they think it belongs to. You may think nothing of that, but I am ashamed."

Tom merely looked at the ceiling and whistled. His argument was dearer to his heart than to his head, and his wife had, as usual, talked him down. At the other side of the table, Christopher smiled as he lit a cigarette. He felt thank-

ful and superior because so far the love of women had not touched him.

§ 2

Dan was a conscientious soul, and he would not break promise to Belle. On the other hand, he took his promise very literally. He had promised not to see her till, the earliest, next week. Therefore, on Sunday morning, immediately after breakfast, he set out for Batchelors' Hall.

By this time he had settled himself into the conviction that he had only to see Belle in order to persuade her. His mind was full of a flood of despairing eloquence, and he hardly realised how little of that tide would actually rise to his lips. Her reasons for refusing to marry him, which still seemed so arbitrary and mysterious, could surely never stand before the torrent of his love, his pity, and his pride in her. Therefore, it was necessary that he should see her at the earliest possible moment, to end his torment and hers.

It was an altogether unexpected blow and backthrust of fate to find, when he came to Batchelors' Hall, that Belle was not there. She had gone away. Such a possibility had never occurred to him. Such a thing had never happened before. Where had she gone?

"How is it that you didn't know?" asked Lucy.

Daniel shivered in the ice of her gaze.

"Reckon she must have made up her mind unaccountable sudden."

"Reckon she did. But it's queer her not having told you. . . ."

Her eyes still froze him; they were like the pale blue cracks in ice.

"Is there anything the matter between you and Belle?" she enquired.

"No—there ain't nothing."

"Because," continued Lucy, "if you back out now, reckon Dad ull have something to say to you."

The freezing process changed disruptively to one like burning alive. Dan suffocated and blazed.

"I back out! I tell you . . . I dunno what you mean. I'll marry Belle to-morrow if she'll have me. You haven't got no right to speak so."

"Oh, very well, don't lose your hair. Only it's strange your not knowing where she is."

He suddenly realised the need for prudence.

"Where is she?" he pleaded.

"Over at her cousin Loo Dengate's at Heathfield. It's queer your not knowing."

"Three Cups Corner?"

"That's it—the house just beyond the throws."

"I'll be up there to-morrow. Reckon it came over her sudden to go. She's a queer girl in some ways."

"Reckon she's not the only one who's queer."

Dan's wrath rekindled.

"Why d'you keep on getting at me, Lucy? I tell you this ain't my doing. I'll marry Belle to-morrow if . . ."

"You know you can't marry her to-morrow, so what's the sense of talking? But if you take my advice you'll marry her just as soon as you can get the banns put up. Now I haven't any more time to spend arguing here. We're short in the house with Belle being away, and old Gadgett's been laid up this week and over, and Botolph needs more looking after than the sheep. Oh, it's a grand life for girls!"—and she banged the door in his face.

§ 3

Dan was so stricken that his first thought was to tramp over at once to Heathfield and find Belle. But his second thoughts reminded him that it would take till night to go there and back on foot, that he could not fail the George at its Sunday evening opening, and that if he waited till to-morrow he could have the trap and avoid a domestic uproar. So he set off drearily homewards, down the drive

and over the flat fields of the Dicker, across the river Cuckmere at Monkyn Pin, then on to the chalky roots of Firle.

He did not particularly want to go home, but there seemed nothing else to do. His own company was intolerable, with its questions and regrets, and there was no other company that seemed better to-day. Mr. Marchbanks would be busy all the afternoon with his church and catechism; besides, he was inclined to take Jess Harman's view of Belle Shackford, and had not been too well pleased to hear of Dan's engagement, though he had said very little. As for Ernley, he was even more impossible. For one thing, Dan had promised not to tell him anything, and knew that he could not be ten minutes in his company without telling him everything. For another, he knew now something of that strange dark attitude towards Ernley which Belle had had towards Pearl Jenner. He knew that it was really Ernley who had robbed him of Belle—or rather, and more humiliating still, that he had never really had Belle so that he could talk of robbery. Belle had always been Ernley's—all the time that she had clung to Daniel and given him kisses and promises she had really been Ernley's, in a far more final and terrible way than any of them knew.

No, he had better go back home, and pour out ale and whiskies, and wash and polish glasses, and lean over the counter and talk of ships and horses to the Sunday loungers between Lewes and Newhaven. Then he would help his mother clear up, and lay the tea, and perhaps she would give him a little kindness, though she must not know what he was feeling. Then in the evening he would go to church, and perhaps find more comfort in the homely smells and drawling melodies of Bullockdean worship, get back in time for the evening's traffic, and then tumble into bed and be tired enough to sleep.

He was hurrying on, dragged by these urgencies, and had nearly reached the top of the Bostal Way, when at a turn he met the district nurse coming down towards Alciston. He wondered vaguely whom she could have been visiting on

the wilderness of the down, when he remembered Lucy's reference to old Gadgett's illness. The shepherd's cottage stood remote in a hollow near White Lion pond. There was no housing close to Batchelors' Hall and for years the old man had lived two miles from the centre of his work. Dan had always been fond of him, and now felt uneasily remorseful for having neglected him during the thrills of courtship. If he had the nurse in, the poor old chap must be pretty bad.

"Good morning, Mr. Sheather."

Daniel had not met the nurse, who lived at Berwick, more than once, but it was characteristic of him that those who met him once always felt well acquainted.

"I've just been talking about you," she continued, "to old Mr. Gadgett at White Lion Cottage, but I never thought to meet you so far from home on a Sunday morning."

Daniel, wondering how much she knew about Belle, blushed and mumbled something about Sunday being a good day for a walk. Then—

"How is the old fellow?" he asked. "I only heard to-day as he's been ill."

"He's sadly, I'm afraid—not likely to leave his bed, though perhaps he'll stop there a month or two before he's carried out. He gets wandering at times—takes me for his daughter, who's been dead thirty years. But I hope some day you'll go and see him. He says you promised him long ago, and he's got something to show you."

"I dunno whatever that can be. But reckon I'll go in some morning. I haven't time to-day."

He must hurry back home, and pour out ale and whiskies, and wash and polish glasses, and lean over the counter and talk of ships and horses to the Sunday loungers between Lewes and Newhaven, help his mother clean up, and lay the tea, and go to church, and carry on somehow, till at last he was tired enough for sleep.

§ 4

Daniel was wrong in his idea that by deferring his visit till Monday he would be able to make it compartively without protest. It appeared that Monday was the very day of James Munk's funeral.

"Go over to Heathfield! I never heard of such a thing!" cried Kitty, "when it's the funeral this afternoon."

"I can't help that, and I don't care for funerals."

"Then you are a wicked boy."

"Come, come, my dear," pleaded Tom, "he never was so thick as all that with poor Munk. If you and I go, and Chris, reckon there won't be any harm in Dan taking the trap over to Heathfield to see Belle."

"He saw her yesterday," said Kitty, for Dan, alas! had been deceitful. "I can't think why he must see her again to-day, especially as she go to Heathfield. Why can't she stay at home?"

Dan looked sullen.

"I can't help it. I must go."

"Must go! Hark to that. Hark to the boy. And what will your dear friend Ernley say if you 'must' go?"

"I don't care what he says. I'm going."

In the end, he went. When Kitty discovered that he hadn't got a decent suit of black clothes and not a single white handkerchief, she minded less. So Daniel drove off soon after breakfast, Ernley's British Warm buttoned up to his chin. The weather was cold and grey and lowering, and clouds of dust bowled up the Lewes road, powdering the banks and hedges till they too were as grey as the sky.

It was a long drive to Heatherfield—across the Ouse at Iford, then into the Beddingham Road at the Lay, then along the huge, dusty, motor-ridden London-to-Eastbourne road as far as Firle Cross, where he had the quiet of lanes once more, through Ripe and Chalvington, twin villages of the plain, as far as Muddles Green. Then it was all cross-country by Thunders Hill and Terrible Down and the unac-

customed roads round Chiddingly. He was on the long wooded slope of country which rises from the valley of the Cuckmere to the heights of Heathfield and Cross-in-Hand, the black-country of a bygone day, when at night forge after forge would show a crimson eye through the dense woods, when the hammers of North Street answered the hammers of Lions Green, when Gun Hill and Thunders Hill and Clappers and Pigstone and Burntchimney first were given their names.

It was the afternoon before he found himself in Heathfield's four-mile street, which runs dwindling from the spot where the yeoman named Iden smote down Jack Cade to where the little lanes of the Rushlake and Dallington Weald flow into it like small streams at Three Cups Corner. He had not much difficulty in finding the Dengates' house, which was just behind the inn, but it was altogether a tougher matter to get speech with Belle.

"I'm sorry, but you can't see her," said the Dengate cousin who opened the door. "She came here to get away from you," she added with disconcerting frankness.

Belle, then, had not been ashamed to tell of the rupture—at least, not to tell her cousins, though her father and sisters had had no explanation. Daniel had not expected this; he had somehow expected her tongue to be tied as his had been. He was now in unanticipated difficulties, but on one thing his mind was made up—he was not going back to Bullockdean without seeing Belle. If he had to hang around the place all night, he would see her. So finding there was nothing to hide from the Dengate cousin, he pleaded valiantly—he begged for just five minutes of Belle—he would shoulder the guilt of any false pretences necessary to obtain the interview—he had come fifteen miles to see her—if she could see him this once he promised to give up and never bother her again—but if she wouldn't see him, he would have to keep on at it till she did. This last consideration may have been the one that influenced Belle, but the Dengate cousin was honestly won by his big dark eyes.

The slightly foreign air of his emotion appealed to her Saxon stolidity, and at last Dan was admitted into the little best parlour of the Dengates, where the walls were adorned with stuffed ferrets and owls, and wedding-groups of the many marriages which had taken place in that large family. Innumerable white brides stared with gentle mocking eyes at him as he sat waiting for Belle.

Directly she came, the whole thing suddenly appeared to him as folly. He had been a fool to pursue her all this way. His importunity had only put him further into her contempt. He should have let her be. She would finish it now—the little that had not been finished in the great barn of Batchelor's Hall.

"Well, Daniel, reckon you might have let me alone."

She was more like a white owl than ever to-day, all the colour gone from her cheeks, all her feathers—the feathers of her golden hair and her brave clothes—limp and draggled. She wore an outdoor coat over her blouse, and in the buttonhole was a dead jonquil. Her boots were all over clay, as if she had tramped the weald.

"You might have let me be."

"I couldn't, Belle."

"Why not? Haven't I suffered enough?"

"That's it. You've suffered too much. It's time you let me comfort you."

"Never."

"But why, Belle? Why? I don't understand."

"You don't understand that I can't have any other husband than my baby's father?"

"Well, that ain't generally what people do."

"What do they do generally?"

His mind went over a series of hasty, patched-up marriages, and he realised for the first time that what he offered Belle was not really a very fine thing.

"You know," he mumbled.

"Yes, I know—they take anyone to give them countenance and a name to the child. But I won't do that. Not because

I'm too proud, but because I just couldn't. . . . When I think of marrying a man who isn't Ernley I feel sick."

"But, darling, I wouldn't ask anything of you—only to be with you and save you from being spoken of and treated bad."

"That ud be a fine life for you."

"I'd sooner have it than life without you."

"You say that now, but you wouldn't say it in a year or two. I'd never let you do a thing like that, and I couldn't bear it myself, neither."

"But, Belle, think what ull happen if you don't marry me. Reckon your father and sister ull go against you; maybe they'll turn you out. You won't have a penny. How are you to manage?"

"I'll manage well enough. I'm able to work."

"But when the time comes."

"I'll be all right."

For the first time he noticed that there was something sulky about Belle—something in the full drooping line of her mouth which hinted at sullenness.

"I shan't be any worse off," she said, "than if you'd never asked me, and reckon it was uncommon queer of you to ask me, so soon after my loosing Ernley and all."

His face went red. He was turning angry. Then he realised that she was hurting him because she'd been so terribly hurt herself, and his anger went its usual course into pity.

"Belle, maybe it ain't too late for you to have Ernley even now. We can't be sure as he's engaged to that girl; and reckon, you've quarrelled and made it up before this."

"He *is* engaged to that girl. He loves her anyway. . . . I wouldn't touch him. I'd sooner die than him marry me now—marry me out of pity. Since I won't let you marry me out of pity, d'you think I'd let him?"

"I'm not wanting to marry you out of pity. I love you, Belle."

She sighed wearily as she saw the argument going back to its beginnings.

"Oh, reckon it's waste of time trying to make you understand. All I wish is that you'd leave me alone. I'm sorry, Daniel, I know I've treated you badly. But I can't help it. I must do as I feel."

"But what *are* you going to do?"

"I dunno yet. Stop on here a bit, and then go back to Father's. Now don't start 'and what ull yer do after that?' I tell you I don't know. I shan't marry you and I shan't marry Ernley, that's all I know."

She turned wearily towards the door, and he knew he could not hold her.

"Belle," he tried piteously, but she shook her head.

"You asked five minutes and I've given you twenty—and we couldn't say any more if we talked all night."

She went stooping through the door, and suddenly he realised that it was closed between them. He was alone with the stuffed ferrets and the white mocking brides.

CHAPTER TEN

BELLE spent at Three Cups Corner some quiet, sullen days. Then she saw that she could not stay there any longer. She must go home and face her fortune. She felt restored by that quiet week—the change of surroundings, her sense of isolation in her aunt's family, whose attitude was casual and whose curiosity easily satisfied, the freedom from manual work—all these things helped build up her mind into a form of courage. She had better go home while she felt like this.

So one afternoon she travelled down-wards, leaving the wealden slope, with its woods and its show of houses, for the lonely reedy places of the Cuckmere winding at the roots of Firle. The family was at tea when she arrived, and during the meal nothing passed but the commonplaces of return, news of the Dengates, and news of the farm; but at the end of it, Ted Shackford hurried the younger members out rather peremptorily.

"It's time you were off to Gadgett's, Nell, with those eggs. Tim will go with you."

"There's no need to start now," grumbled Nell. "It's the first time I've sat down this afternoon."

"You be off," said her father, with such unaccustomed decision that she actually rose to go.

"Don't be a fool," Belle heard Tim whisper to her as they went through the door—"they're going to ask Belle about the baby."

So she was not going to be kept long in suspense. The racket was going to start right off this minute. She wished she could have entered into it without the disconcertment

of Tim's words, without the blush and the prick of tears that they had brought. Still, it was just as well for her to realise what she was in for with her family.

Lucy remained seated at the table, blushing as red as Belle; Ted Shackford had risen and slouched about the room.

"When are you going to get married?" he asked suddenly.

"Never, as far as I know."

"How d'you mean?"

"I've broken off my engagement with Daniel Sheather."

"Broken it off! When?"

"Before I went to Heathfield."

"*You* broke it off—yourself? In heaven's name. . . ."

"Don't be a fool, Belle," said Lucy; "you can speak the truth to us. If that man's let you down, Dad ull jolly well make him——"

"He hasn't let me down. He'd marry me at once if I'd have him, but I won't."

"Are you quite mad?"

"Maybe." Belle laughed.

"But, look here," continued Lucy, "we've a right to know why you've done this. Why do you send him away directly you know that if you don't marry——"

"That's just it. I'm not going to marry Daniel Sheather just because I'm going to have another man's child. I don't love him and I couldn't bear it."

"But if you don't love him why the hell did you get engaged to him in the first place?" cried Shackford.

"Because I thought I could love him some day, and I—I didn't know this."

"But are you so thick that you can't see that it's this what makes it all the more necessary that you should get married at once?"

"Not to Daniel Sheather."

"Oh, I see. You're still thinking of Munk."

Belle winced.

"I'm not."

"But you must marry one or other of 'em."

"I shan't marry neither."

"I don't believe she's broken it off," said Lucy. "I believe it's Sheather's cried off now he knows."

"Well, I'll soon find out if it's that," said her father. "I'm going over to see him to-morrow."

"No, Dad, no! For heaven's sake leave Daniel alone. I tell you it's my doing, not his. I won't have him."

"Will you have Munk, then?"

"No, I won't. And, besides, he's engaged to somebody else."

"Oh, is he? He thinks he can do that sort of thing when he's landed you in this mess. I'll soon show him different."

"Oh, Father, I'd rather die——"

"I think you're very selfish, Belle," said Lucy. "Don't you see that it's not only you who has to go through this, it's all of us. If you have a baby without being married, your family will get some of the disgrace; and me hoping soon to be married myself——" Lucy held up her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I can't help that," said Belle sullenly. "If you like, I'll go right away."

"That won't help us much," wailed Lucy. "People ull get to know of it just the same. Really, Belle, I do think you might consider your family a little. For years now we've put up with your goings-on. I don't want to preach, but really I think you deserve what you've got. First it's been one man and then it's been another, and you've been lucky that this hasn't happened long ago. Now at last you've got the chance of marrying and settling down, and you won't take it."

"I tell you I don't love him."

"And I tell you that you ought to sacrifice yourself a little and not insist on that. Besides, you don't know whether you love him or whether you don't. You loved him two months ago."

"I didn't really."

"Then you were a fool, and you've no right to ask us to take the consequences of the silly things you done."

"Would you marry Munk?" asked her father.

"No—no—not for worlds."

"Well, you've got to marry one of 'em—either the one who's willing or the one who ain't. I tell you I'm going over to see 'em both to-morrow, so you can choose which you'll have."

"Dad, you'd never!"

"By God, I will! I've stood enough from you Miss. Reckon I'm an easy-going chap or I'd have learned you better ways. But now you've gone too far—dragged us all into the mud and then turned obstinate. This isn't the time for you to chuck a good offer of marriage. You aren't ever likely to get another, and if your sort don't marry it goes to the bad. It'll be a fine thing for us when we've got a daughter on the town—prouder than ever we'll be of our Belle. You behave yourself and try and undo a little of the bad you've done. If you won't marry Daniel Sheather, you can marry Ernley Munk, and I give you till to-morrow to decide which."

Belle burst into tears.

"I can't be sorry for you," said Lucy; "you've thought of nobody but yourself all through. You don't know how it stands against a girl to have a bad lot for her sister. If you've got no shame on your own account, you might have a little on ours. Besides, this time next year, you'll be jolly glad we made you patch it up."

"I won't! I won't! I'll die sooner than marry either of them. There's no good your going over to Bullockdean, Dad; I won't have either Dan or Ernley, and they won't have me, neither. You'll only have disgraced me for nothing."

"Disgrace! You talk as if that was something new for you. Disgrace! You're a walking disgrace, and if I was a man like my father I'd have given you the rope's end long

ago and learned you morals. I tell you what's going to happen now. If by to-morrow morning you've given me your solemn promise you'll marry Sheather, I'll go over and settle up with him, and there won't be any more trouble. But if you won't have Sheather, you shall have Munk. I'll see him to-morrow, and if he's engaged to Princess Mary he'll have to chuck her and marry you."

"He can't—he won't—and I won't have him if he does."

"Well, I'll have a try anyhow. At least, he shall know what's happened and what's expected."

"Don't!" cried Belle.

But Shackford, furious as only an easy-going man can be, had gone out, slamming the door.

Belle turned wildly on Lucy.

"You swine! You might have stood by me! At least we're both women."

She clutched Lucy's fair crimped hair in her hands as she sat at the table, and pulled it about her ears. Lucy screamed, and Belle, suddenly more terrified of herself than of anything, ran out of the room.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

§ 1

THE next morning Daniel Sheather was serving in his father's bar when Ernley Munk walked in. He had not seen nor spoken to Ernley since James Munk's death, and he felt horribly embarrassed at the sight of him, in a smart new suit of clerical grey with a black tie.

"Well, Daniel, you're a nice one."

Daniel could not find a suitable reply. He felt acutely that he was indeed "a nice one." His rupture with Belle was now public property, and Ernley must have heard of it days ago and be waiting for the confidences due to the event, though that same event may also have explained his callous ignoring of his friend's recent trouble.

"I made sure you'd be coming over to see me," continued Ernley. "Every night I've been expecting you, since the funeral—and before it too."

Dan still said nothing. Since the day which was to Ernley the day of the funeral and to him the day when he had last seen Belle, he had scarcely left the George. The condolences of his own family, mixed as they were with covert relief, had been hard enough to bear without the thought of enlarging their circle in Bullockdean. Mr. Marchbanks, Jess and Maudie Harman, and Ernley himself would all be glad to know that Daniel Sheather was not going to marry Belle Shackford after all—"Never would have done—not a bit his sort—I told him so." He could hear everybody saying: "Thank heaven he's escaped before it was too late. I wonder why it was broken off." . . . Relief and curiosity, covered by varying thicknesses of compassion, were all he had to expect from his friends, so he had kept away from

them, preferring the company of the strangers who came to the George from Lewes and Newhaven. In their society he had drunk a great many bad whiskies, and had even taken part in those mysterious shufflings with the names of horses and slips of paper which it had always been his business to detect and stop. . . . Now he felt ashamed. He saw that he had behaved badly and had treated his friends badly.

"I'm sorry, Ernie," he mumbled.

"So am I, old chap. Damnably sorry. You've been let in for a wretched business. Look here, can't your brother take over this bottle-washing for a bit, and you come and have a drink with me across the road. We may be interrupted any moment here."

Dan doubted very much whether Chris would be so obliging, but solved the problem by calling his father. Tom was only too glad for his son to get out of the place for a bit. He did not care for this solemn, home-hugging, whiskey-drinking Daniel, and was relieved to see him cross the road once more in Ernley's neglected company.

The Crown was wrapped in its usual noontide peace. The bar was red with sunshine that streamed through its bright curtains on to the clean sawdust of the floor and the polished table at which the farmer of Burnt Green and the farmer of Highbarn sat talking and drinking ale. From behind the counter Maudie Harman smiled a speechless welcome.

"We're getting ready for Easter," said Ernley, as they went upstairs. "Two sets of people coming—one on the second and one on the fourth."

"Shall you keep things going as they used to be?"

"More or less. I've got the same ideas as Dad—I want to make a decent little country hotel out of this place. We're getting on that way. . . . Next year I may run up an extra wing. People seem to care less and less for going into Apartments in the country. They got scared off that during the war. What they want now is a cosy little pub—that sort like it called a pub—which ull take 'em in at about three guineas a week. They find that over a month's stay it

doesn't work out at much more than, say, three or four rooms at a quid each and all the bother of doing their own catering. I shall give luncheons and teas as well. I'll put up a sign on the highroad this summer, but to private parties only—no beanfeasts or charabanc crowds. Now, you could do that if you liked; it would mix well with your sort of business and wouldn't interfere with ours. The only way for two pubs to exist in a village this size is for them to follow different lines and cater for different sorts of customers; and that's what the George and the Crown have done up till now."

While he rattled on in this way he was busy fetching drinks. He evidently did not want to talk of intimate matters till they had a bottle between them.

Daniel took the hint.

"You needn't worry about us trying to poach on your lay," he said, bitterly. "We couldn't manage the charabanc parties even. I reckon you're right in saying we ought to keep to different lines, but you needn't talk as if ours paid as well as yours. You can't make much money out of drinks these days, especially when you sell drink like ours."

"Well, try some of this. It'll put a heart into you. It's a special malting of Truby's I was lucky enough to get a cask of, and am bottling myself. It's like wine—got a bouquet instead of froth," and Ernley passed his nose over his glass before sipping it.

Dan drank his in a less experienced manner, but if it did not actually put a heart into him, it put a tongue.

"I suppose that as a start off to this scheme of yours, you'll get married," he remarked.

"Married! Whom to?"

"Why Miss Jenner, of course."

"Miss Jenner would not be flattered to hear you say so. She has set her hopes on something far higher than a country publican. Besides, she isn't at all the sort of girl I'd want for keeps."

Daniel stared.

"Then why did you trot her out like that in front of us all?—said you wouldn't come along to supper unless you brought her. I made sure you were engaged."

"I trotted her out, as you call it, because I didn't want Belle to think she was the only one who had got over our little affair and fallen in love with somebody else."

Daniel gaped as well as stared. Ernley's words seemed to him rather too glaring an example of the truth to be found in strong ale.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," continued Ernley.

"About Miss Jenner?"

"No—you fool. About Belle."

Daniel flushed miserably. Even Messrs. Truby's first malting was unable to make him face that topic in a gallant spirit.

"I thought you'd have come over and told me about it," reproached Ernley.

"I couldn't—I felt too bad."

"You were afraid, I suppose, that I'd say, 'I told you so,' or 'it's a good thing you found out in time,' "

"Found out what?" cried Dan with a start.

"That you weren't suited to each other. You were afraid I'd say that, so you kept away. I'm sorry you didn't come, for it ud have done you good. Your sort of chap is always the better for talking. I'm going to make you talk about it now, and you've no idea how much better you'll feel."

Daniel for some reason felt affronted. Ernley seemed to be patronising him from the vantage of his free heart.

"I don't want to talk about her."

"But I do. I want to talk about her most particularly. I want you to tell me if the reason of her giving you up was that she's still keen on me."

Daniel was utterly taken aback, and could not answer.

"Is Belle Shackford still keen on me?" asked Ernley, his eyes glittering.

Dan had by this time collected himself enough to remember

that his vow of secrecy did not necessarily cover more than Belle's condition. He had not promised never to divulge her feelings.

"Well, reckon she is keen on you. But what difference does it make?"

"A lot."

"You don't mean. . . .you're not telling me that you're still sweet on her."

"I am. Keen and sweet."

Daniel spluttered.

"Then why the hell. . . . why the hell did you let me . . . . I tell you I'd never have courted her if I'd known . . . . You told me you were shut of her—it was all finished."

Ernley rose to his feet, and came and stood beside Daniel's chair, his hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, old Daniel. The thing's like this. It isn't your fault, I blame myself entirely. I told you I wasn't keen on Belle because I was too proud to let on that I was, after all that had happened. I made sure that she'd finished with me, too, and I was afraid that if you guessed I was still fond of her, you'd tell her somehow. Another thing I made sure of was that she'd never have you. When I found she would, I was knocked over. Then I simply had to get hold of Pearl and trot her out. I wasn't going to let Belle think I still wanted her, and I wanted her so much that I felt everyone must know it. Then Dad died, and I knew I was a free man and could have married Belle if we'd still been lovers. That made me pretty mad, you bet. Then I heard she'd broken with you. . . ."

The rapid flow of words was checked and he stared at Daniel.

"I reckon," said young Sheather, "that you think I'm unaccountable good-natured."

"Because I believe I can talk frankly to you about what I feel for Belle?"

"Because you can talk so calm about all you've made Belle

and me suffer through not knowing your own mind and being too proud to speak it when you did. We've been in hell both of us—through you. And now there's no good you talking of her caring about you still, for she won't have you, whether she cares or not. It's too late."

"How d'you mean?"

"Well, reckon she'll never take you on again now, for all that she won't have me. She told me she wouldn't. She told me she'd rather die ...."

He rose to his feet as he spoke, and for a moment the two men stared at each other in silence. Then they were startled by a knock at the door.

"Who's that?" cried Ernley.

"A gentleman to see you, sir, downstairs. A Mr. Shackford. . . ."

§ 2

There was a brief pause. Then Ernley said:

"Show him up."

"I don't want to see him," cried Daniel.

"Don't be a fool! You've nothing to reproach yourself with. It isn't you he's come after. I wonder what he wants out of me."

Daniel turned away and stood by the window. For that moment he hated Ernley, who in the midst of all this tragedy and humiliation was happy and confident because he knew Belle still cared for him. He did not worry about her outraged heart or the barriers it had set up; he did not really care about Daniel's sorrow; he was telling himself what he had said he would never have told Daniel—that he and Belle weren't suited to each other and therefore it was all for the best that they had found out in time . . . "In time"—that was good—"in time" for Ernley still to have her . . . The Sheather worm was turning.

Shackford walked in.

"Hullo! Both of you in here. That's what I want. I

went to the George first and they told me Sheather was at the Crown. I want a word with both of you. Where's my daughter?"

The question was equally startling to both. Dan turned from the window and came forward into the room.

"Isn't she at home?" he asked, bewildered.

"If she was, I'd scarcely have come all this way to ask you where she'd got to."

Shackford evidently meant to be unpleasant.

"We neither of us have the faintest idea where she is," said Ernley, "though we were talking about her when you came in. When did she disappear?"

"Yesterday evening, after a row with her sister."

"Then why should you imagine that either Sheather or I know where she is?"

"Well, reckon both you men know more about my girl than I do."

Dan's memory was whirling with fears. It seemed extraordinary to him that Ernley could still retain his calm assurance, now with an added touch of impudence. Was the fact of Belle's love so sustaining and fulfilling that it would suffice even when Belle herself might be lost in danger or even in death?

"I believe she's killed herself."

The words burst from him as he remembered her own. He saw her standing before him pale and rigid, he heard her say: "If you do, I'll kill myself. . . .I'd rather die than. . . ."

"Killed herself! Why should she have killed herself," asked Ernley, "after a row with her sister?"

"I guess what the row was about. Reckon everybody was on to her, same as I was, wanting her to tell you or else marry me."

"I said she must marry one or the other of you, and I'd come over here this morning and settle with whoever she chose. I told her there was to be no getting out of it, not by her or by either of you fine gentlemen. Then I went off,

and she fell upon her poor sister Lucy and hit her about—and then ran away goodness knows where."

"She's killed herself," cried Daniel desperately. "She said she would if Ernley knew, and you said you were going to tell him."

"Tell him! I reckon he don't want much telling."

"What do you mean?" asked Ernley. "What's all this about telling?"

"I reckon you know that the reason this man here has broken off with my daughter is that he'd no liking for all you'd let him in for in the family way."

"It ain't true!" cried Daniel, "I never broke off. I'd have married her any day, and she knew it. It was she who said she couldn't have me. . . ."

His voice tailed off as he looked at Ernley. All his calm assurance was gone now, suddenly broken, like a bubble. His face was colourless, and he clutched the back of a chair.

"Do you mean to tell me that Belle is going to have a child?"

"I do, sir."

"Then why in God's name. . . ."

"She wouldn't have you told," cried Daniel. "She said she'd kill herself if I told you, and now I reckon she's done it."

"How long have you known this?"

"Maybe a week or ten days. When Belle knew for certain, she said she couldn't marry me, or anybody but you. So you needn't talk of my breaking off——" turning angrily on Shackford.

"And you knew that and never told me."

"She made me promise I wouldn't. She said she'd kill herself if I did. She said she'd rather die than marry you."

"You fool! You blasted bone-headed fool! You believe everything a girl says when she's beside herself, and freeze on to a secret that may ruin two lives. I'll marry Belle the minute I find her, and you bet she won't make any fuss."

"You speak like a gentleman," cried Shackford. "I knew

you'd do the proper thing if you was given a chance. I said the same to her. It's a lucky thing I came over. It's a lucky thing I wasn't like some people, listening to every silly thing a silly girl says."

Daniel felt these censures undeserved.

"If she didn't mean what she said, why did she run away like that?"

"She'd had a row with her sister, I tell you—pulled down her hair and scratched her face—not that she hadn't good reason"—remembering that Ernley was now a man of intentions. "Lucy's got a tongue like a wasp's sting, and reckon Belle was getting terrible worked up at everything. She's the best-tempered girl in the world as a rule. That's why she's run away; she's ashamed of herself. But I bet she hasn't gone far—back to her cousins at Heathfield, most like, where she'd just come from."

"Well, you'd better go and look for her there," said Daniel, almost crying, "and then come back and drag the pond."

"I'll go over at once on my 'bus," said Ernley. "How did you come here?" he asked Shackford.

"I came on horseback, and if you're going to Three Cups, I'll just ride quietly home again. You'll do your job better without me."

"You're just pretending you think she's at Three Cups," broke in Daniel. "You know she ain't there really. You know she's drowned herself."

But Ernley had recovered his old assurance.

"Don't be a fool, Daniel," he said, quite good-humouredly, as he went out of the room.

§ 3

But when the afternoon came, Daniel too had his legitimate reproaches, which he was too human not to make. Ernley had returned from the weald—so much faster the miles flew under the tyres of his motor-bicycle than under the wheels

of the George trap—and his quest had been in vain. Through his cocksureness he had lost valuable hours that might have been spent in search. He and Shackford had yielded to the fatal optimism of men who know themselves to be in the wrong and try to recover their self-respect through hope.

He was chastened by his failure. He no longer swaggered before Daniel, he no longer abused him. Indeed, he listened to his advice, and together they set off, in saddle and sidecar, to make inquiries and notify the police. The evening passed fruitlessly. The police had no light to shed on the affair, and Belle's friends, either in Lewes or Newhaven, had heard nothing of her. Perhaps she had gone off somewhere by rail, but once again inquiries whether at Lewes Junction or the wayside stations brought no result. Daniel no longer said, "She's killed herself." He sat dumb beside Ernley in the side car, or followed dumb behind him up and down stairs and along passages. It was Ernley at last who said:

"We'd better get over to Batchelors' and drag the pond."

The spring night had fallen as they bowled up towards Lewes from the coast. A faint greenish light hung over the downs, and the summit of the sky was full of stars. A keen wind blew in their faces, bringing dampness and chill. Dan shuddered and still was dumb.

Ernley's headlight rushed before them over the surface of the road, with a flying gleam on the hedges. It lit up the wheels and sides of passing waggons, leaving their loads in darkness; it lit up the doors and steps of houses as they ran through Beddingham and Firle; and always it showed them half a dozen red yards of road ahead. As they rushed on Daniel had the absurd dream that if only they could reach the end of that crimson road before them they would find Belle. But the red road was like the moon's path on the sea; it had no ending.

Neither of them spoke as the motor-cycle ate up the road and the darkness. At last it bumped into the drive of Batchelors' Hall, lurching and creaking in the ruts, the engine labouring with the drag of mud on the wheels. The

red light flashed over the puddles and the long canals in the ruts; it ran ahead of them into the yard and lay on the stones as Ernley brought the machine to a standstill.

Shackford stood on the doorstep. He too had lost his compensating hope, and looked like Ernley, hangdog and desperate.

"Any good?" he asked.

Munk shook his head.

"I'll get the men," said Belle's father, "and drag the pond; and if that's no good we'll try the Cuckmere."

That night, it seemed to Daniel, was full of water—the sight of it, red with the lanterns held over it; the sound of it, lapping against the shore, and against the sides of the boat in which Bream the cowman put out with a long pole; the feel of it oozing through the mud over the tops of his shoes. . . . The pond yielded a load of weeds, a stock of old iron-ware, and three little drowned kittens in a bag with a stone.

Between dragging the pond and dragging the river they had drinks in the house. Dan and the farm-men had cocoa, but Ernley and Shackford had whiskies without much water. Lucy served them, fully dressed though it was one o'clock in the morning, and with the pretty hair that Belle had torn down, piled high and waved anew. The tears ran down her cheeks, and she spoke forgivingly of Belle.

"Of course, I forgive her," she said. "She didn't know what she was doing."

Nobody else spoke much. Even the whiskies did not seem to help Shackford and Ernley; and soon they all went out again. They dragged the place where the Cuckmere in its windings makes a bay, eating into the meadows by Hayreed. But here again there was no finding. After all, they did not really expect to find. As Shackford said, Belle might have chucked herself in anywhere between Monkyn Pin and the Dicker. They had no special reason to think she would inevitably have drowned herself near home.

Daniel thought of White Lion Pond and Red Lion Pond

and Jerry's Pond, all the dew-ponds between the valley of the Cuckmere and the valley of the Ouse.

"She may have gone up on the down," he said.

Both Shackford and Ernley thought it probable that she had. They had searched the Ouse and Cuckmere valleys, the two big towns and the railway line. Also, during the afternoon, when Ernley and Dan were rushing about on the motor-cycle, Shackford had made inquiries at the two Dickers and the two Horsebridges, also at Hailsham, where he had interviewed a couple of conductors on the Eastbourne 'bus route. The down seemed the only hiding-place left unchallenged. It was decided to make up a search-party.

§ 4

"Let me walk with you, Daniel," said Ernley when everyone scattered.

The dawn was white, and only a few stars still hung in the north, above the Gate of Lewes. It was bitterly cold, and the men shivered. They all carried lanterns, for it had been dark when they left Batchelors' Hall, and the moving spots of light were like stars, making the down look like a fallen sky.

If Belle were hiding, if she had sought only a temporary and not a final refuge from her oppressors, she might see those stars and go out towards them. She surely would be tired of hiding now—now that the down's back was hoar with half-frozen dew and the dawn-wind searched the hollows. Ernley's face was pinched and his teeth chattered. He was almost failing physically. A day spent in the saddle of his machine, a night spent in dragging a pond and a river, all under the strain of sickening remorse and anxiety—and to finish all, too many whiskies . . . no wonder he was done for. Daniel, whose physical labours had been less, whose physical strength was greater, and who was not suffering from a reaction after too much alchohol, was still comparatively able-bodied, though—dreadful and humiliating to real-

ise—most unconscionably sleepy. He waited for Ernley while he puffed on the steep slope; he slackened his pace to match Ernley's tottering progress.

"Don't you think you'd better get home?" he suggested at last.

"I couldn't. I couldn't rest till she's found—alive or dead."

They walked on a couple of furlongs. Then Ernley said:

"Do you think there's any chance of her being alive, Dan?"

"Maybe there's a chance; maybe we'd think there was more than a chance if we weren't so terrible scared. She's been gone only a day and two nights. Reckon she could have hid herself for that."

"If I find her," said Ernley—and in the grey light Dan could see that he was crying—"if I find her, there's going to be nothing good enough for her. Oh, Dan, how am I ever to pay her back for what I've made her suffer?" His voice, though hoarse, was quite calm, in spite of the tears that ran down his cheeks. It was only physical weakness that made him cry. The grief of his heart was beyond tears.

"Don't think I fail to realise what you suffer, Daniel. But it's nothing to what I do. It can't be. You've nothing to reproach yourself with. You've been kind and manly and decent all through. I haven't. I've been a swine—a proud swine and a cruel swine. All the quarrels we ever had were my doing, and I blamed her for them all. I was angry with her because I couldn't give her what she wanted. I could have given it to her if I'd wanted it as much as she did, but I didn't; so I was angry with her for wanting it. I took advantage of her, Dan, because she wasn't wise, like most women. If she'd said, 'You must wait till we're married,' I'd have married her rather than wait. But she didn't, and I took advantage of her and made her wait till I thought things ud be more convenient. If we'd been married, we shouldn't have had any of those rows, for they all came

of her not really belonging to me. If we'd belonged to each other, we shouldn't have mistrusted each other so, and been jealous, and imagined all sorts of things about each other. Then this last time we quarrelled, I was furious with her because of the way I'd hurt her, and I swore I'd never make it up again. I couldn't stand being made ashamed of myself time after time like that, so I swore I'd stop it, and started off with Pearl Jenner at once just to show Belle it was good-bye forever this time. . . . I said to myself she was getting to count on my coming round. . . . Oh, and she'd humbled me too; she didn't let me off easy. . . . I paid for every quarrel we had by the way I was obliged to make it up. . . . But I couldn't live without her, so I always came back, and I said: 'She knows it. She expects it this time, so I'll teach her she don't always get what she expects.' That's why I took up with Pearl, though she was only trash—only draper's stuff. I must say it was a blow to me when Belle got engaged to you. It made me swank more than ever: Belle wasn't to know I cared. She wasn't going to marry you, knowing that I still loved her, and get the last laugh. I never thought. . . . It's my blasted pride that's driven her to this. She couldn't even turn to me when she wanted to. I've cut her off. Think, all that time I was so mad against her, she was carrying my child. Oh, there's fate in that—the fate of my own bad will. I've done her in. Poor Belle!"

Dan tried not to listen while Ernley spoke. He blushed to hear his friend's confession; he was horrified at this stripping of his mind. If this was love—the genuine passion as apart from the jog-trot emotion he was supposed to feel—he was glad he had never experienced it.

"Reckon you're tired out," was all he could say. "You'll be ill if we go any further; you'd better get home."

The day was quite clear now, though the sun had not yet risen. Their lanterns were no longer stars, merely opaque orange splashes on the whiteness of the morning.

"I can't go as far as Bullockdean," said Ernley.

"Then we'd better turn back for Batchelors'. Besides, your bike's there, and Lucy can give you some breakfast before you start."

He was relieved to find that Munk had given way, for he was obviously unfit to go searching much further. By daylight his face looked far more ravaged than it had looked in the glow of the lanterns. His body, gassed and wounded, bore the stigmata of war, and was always liable to sudden collapses. Dan gave him an arm as they turned backwards, and his friend seemed glad of it. Sheather was glad too. He loved to expend physical care and protection, though he shrank from the sick-nursing of souls. With Ernley's body he was tender.

"There—hang on to me. I'm strong as a horse; you can put all your weight."

They went on half a mile, Munk occasionally stumbling but always held up by Dan's sturdiness. When they came to the dip of the down, where the slope ran swiftly towards Alciston, he stopped and shuddered.

"I can't go down there. I feel giddy."

With memories of the same symptoms in earlier "attacks," Dan was practical.

"There, there—don't worry—don't try. Sit down."

Ernley collapsed in a huddled heap upon the hoar dew. Dan sat down beside him with supporting arm, and was immediately conscious, as the other in his nervous straits was not, of the wet striking up into his limbs.

"Reckon you shouldn't ought to sit here. You'll get rheumatics."

"I can't help it, I'm done."

Dan looked round him for an unlikely stone. Nothing broke the whiteness of the half-frozen dew, but he suddenly realised the turning to old Gadgett's cottage at the top of Bostal Way.

"Look here, if you can walk just a hundred yards, there's Gadgett's cottage we could go to. Then you could sit by the fire and I'd get you a cup of tea."

Ernley groaned. His devil was upon him—the devil that had risen in a hideous cloud behind the headless trees of Waertsel Wood, and crawling and stinking over the shell-holes had found him where he lay helpless, and taken possession. Nevertheless, the picture that Dan painted was a fair one.

"Couldn't you bring the tea to me here?" he asked idiotically.

"Of course, I couldn't; it ud be stone cold. And even if it wasn't, it wouldn't do you any good sitting here on the wet grass. You'll get rheumatics and lumbago and sciatica and bellyache and chills and pneumonia and I dunno wot else if you don't stand up quick."

He stood up himself, and seized Ernley under the armpits.

"Now then—up you get."

Ernley groaned, and Dan brought his knee in ungentle contact with his spine.

"Get up, Ernie."

This wasn't his first encounter with his friend's devil, and he knew that Ernley possessed must be treated in direct contrast to Ernley unpossessed. He must be bullied and ordered about, just as on ordinary occasions he must be looked up to and treated respectfully. It was characteristic of Dan that he slipped quite naturally into the latter mood when the need for the former had passed.

He soon had Munk on his feet, and part threatening, part coaxing, part hauling, guided him over the down to the head of the Bostal Way, then along the little chalk path that winds among the blackberry bushes, till at last they were on the step of Gadgett's cottage.

CHAPTER TWELVE

§ 1

THE morning was still colourless, for though the sun had risen, there was no pomp in the east, which was iron-grey with clouds. The down's back, under its coat of rime, was grey too, like the hull of a man-o'-war. Even the cottage had assumed the prevailing tones of grey and white, with pits and streaks of blackness where the shadows fell. White Lion cottage and a couple of disused barns stood about a hundred yards from the pond at the top of the Bostal Way. On either side of the doorstep daffodils were abloom, but as dredged of colour as the lanterns which Daniel and Ernley still foolishly carried were dredged of light.

"The place ull be shut up," said Munk.

"No it won't. Reckon he's got to leave the door open for the nurse. Anyways, I don't suppose he'd lock up; that's a high-class custom."

He proved to be right. The door was on the latch, so he pushed Ernley in, and through into the kitchen. The fire was laid, and Daniel soon had a light in it, with the kettle on to boil. He propped up Ernley in the wicker arm-chair, with his feet on the grate, and the hearthrug over his knees.

"And now while the kettle's boiling I'll go upstairs and have a look at the old man. Maybe he's heard us come in and is wondering what it's all about."

He ran up the ladder-like little flight, and listened for a moment outside the bedroom door. Not a sound was to be heard. He pushed the door open and looked in. The curtains were only half-drawn, so the daylight was in the room,

smiting the light of a small fire burning smokily in the grate, and the flame of a single candle on the dresser beside the bed. In the mixture of daylight, firelight, and candle-light he could see the old man lying asleep in the bed; and in a chair beside him, an open Bible on her knee, her head fallen sideways on her shoulder, her legs stretched out forlornly in tattered stockings, slept Belle Shackford.

Daniel stood and gaped, shut his eyes to make sure he wasn't dreaming, then opened them and gaped again. It would be hard to say when he would have recovered the use of his faculties if Belle had not woken up.

"Hullo," she said dreamily.

"Belle!" gasped Daniel.

She woke up fully, and sprang to her feet.

"How did you get here?"

"How did you get here?"

They faced each other, almost terrified. He did not dare tell her Ernley was in the house.

"Oh, Belle! I've been nearly dead because of you. What in the Lord's name are you doing here? Reckon your Dad's out searching the whole down after you."

There was a slight stir of the forgotten figure in the bed.

"My dear. . . ."

"It's all right, Father. I'm here."

She went to the old man's side and stooped over him.

"I'll get you your tea in a minute."

"That's right, dearie—that's right. 'Tis only I had a dream about your mother and your Aunt Hetty."

"I'll put on the kettle straight away."

She moved across to the fireplace.

"I've a kettle on downstairs," said Daniel.

"What made you come? How on earth did you know I was here?"

"I didn't know—leastways—anyways I've put the kettle on."

"Who's the young chap?" came from the bed.

"He's Daniel Sheather, Father."

Daniel was growing more and more confused.

"Has he coming a-courting you?"

"No, dear, not he!"

"Well, I'm glad of it, for I'd be sorry to lose you yet awhile. I've had a bit of a cold, Ma'as Sheather—a bit of a cold, and just a touch of rheumatics in my boans, so as I can't get out on the hill just now. Howsumever, my young darter has been looking after me fine, and I reckon to be out in a day or two."

Dan did not know what to say. The situation was beyond him. However, he was spared the burden of carrying on the conversation, for at that moment a loud fretful voice shouted from downstairs.

"Where the hell have you got to, Daniel? The kettle's boiling over."

Belle jerked herself upright on her knees beside the fire.

"Who's that?"

Daniel stuttered.

"It's Ernley," cried Belle.

She looked towards the door, then out of the window. She was like a hare when the pack has cornered her.

"Let me go!" she cried frantically. "Let me go!" Then—"Daniel, don't let him find me."

But her panic had betrayed her, and her voice had reached Ernley in the kitchen below.

"Daniel! who's that upstairs?"

For a moment Daniel thought Belle would climb out of the window. She made a movement towards it, then suddenly seemed to turn to wood. A footstep mounted on the stairs, and she stood like a wooden woman in the middle of the floor, staring over Daniel's shoulder through the open door behind him. Then, also quite silent, Ernley came into the room, and took her in his arms, still made of wood.

§ 2

Daniel did not see her return to flesh and blood. After he had held her stiffly and silently in his arms for a few moments, Ernley led her away, and the next thing Sheather became conscious of was the kitchen door shutting behind them.

"Who's the young chap?" asked Gadgett.

"Ernley Munk—from the Crown at Bullockdean."

"Munk. . . . Munk. . . . It's Pepper at the Crown. I hope Pepper ain't courting my young Ellen. He ain't a straight chap. He chalked me up a quartern pot when I'd only had a pint. I won't have my Ellen courted by a chap who can't measure his ale. . . . Say, young feller, she's gone out wudout making my tea. Reckon I'm parched fur a cup o' tea."

It was Dan's lot, somehow, to be making tea while the skies were falling. Evidently, fate refused to take him seriously in a tragic part. While Ernley and Belle fought for the life of their wounded love downstairs, he pottered about the bedroom with the kettle and tea-cups, shook up old Gadgett's pillows and made him comfortable, gave him his medicine, and answered obligingly to the name of Jack.

Once he crept down and listened at the kitchen door. A curious silence brooded within; then he heard a faint movement and a still fainter voice. . . . Evidently love was not being healed with words. As he went upstairs again there was a stir in the house behind him, and he saw that the nurse had come in.

"Hullo, Mr. Sheather!" she called. "I never expected to find anyone here so early."

"Don't go into the kitchen," pleaded Daniel.

"And why not?"

"Because Miss Belle Shackford's in there."

"Miss Belle Shackford! You don't mean to say she's found?"

"It's odd as she ain't been found before seeing as she's seemingly been here all the time."

"She can't have been. I was here at six o'clock last night."

"Reckon she went and hid when she saw you coming. I brought Ernley Munk in here to make him a cup of tea as he was feeling a bit ordinary, and there was Belle sitting beside the old man, and him thinking she was his daughter who's been dead ten years."

"He takes every female he sees for his daughter. Many's the time he's called me Ellen and told me not to start walking out with their shepherd at Place. We must see about getting him into the infirmary some day soon. I've let him stop on here as he seemed so set on it, but most days he doesn't know or care where he is."

She had come into the room and went bustling over to the bedside.

"Well—what's this I hear about you? You've been sheltering a lady."

But old Gadgett was unequal to raillery, and confused by these flitting females. Dan thought it best to rescue him from the nurse's ministrations.

"I've given him his medicine, and his tea along of it. Reckon he won't want much doing for him. If you're going back to Alciston it ud be Christian charity for you to call over to Batchelors' and tell 'em there she's found."

"It ud be better still if I took her back with me. What's she doing down in the kitchen all by herself."

"She ain't by herself."

"Oh!"

The nurse looked wise, and at the same time as if she expected further enlightenment. But Dan said nothing. He stood with his back to her, drumming at the window.

"Is Mr. Ernley Munk with her?"

The rumour of Belle's troubles was now up and down the two valleys of the Ouse and the Cuckmere.

"No, he ain't," snapped Daniel. Which was a pity, as

the nurse ran into him and Belle at the bottom of the stairs, and thence forward had no high opinion of young Sheather's truthfulness.

§ 3

They came into the bedroom together, and found Daniel sitting on the low chair beside the bed, where the old man was dozing off again.

Seeing them standing together, he knew instinctively that they were reconciled. But there was nothing triumphant, nothing passionate about their reconciliation. They stood stiffly side by side, without word or caress. Evidently they had come by stormy paths to peace.

"Hullo," he said awkwardly.

"It's all right, Dan," said Ernley in a quiet, rather flat voice, "Belle and I are friends again, and we're going to be married as soon as ever it's possible."

There was no display of rapture to make him jealous—scarcely, indeed, the appearance of ordinary happiness. None the less, Daniel felt sore right through. He had not realised till then that up to that very moment, in the face of the impossible, he had been hoping that Belle might change, and turn to him again.

"It really is forever this time," Munk continued, with a faint smile. "We're not going to quarrel any more. It hurts too much, doesn't it, Belle."

"Yes, it hurts," she nodded.

"And we're both ever so grateful to you, Dan, for being such a good friend to us both."

Dan coloured. He did not feel specially a friend of either at the present moment. If they had been richly and aggressively happy, he would have felt less alienated than he was now by their queer exhaustion. He saw mysteries, depths in their being which had always hitherto been veiled from him, the outsider, but which were not strange to either of those two.

"How are you, Ernley?" he asked, deliberately breaking the situation.

"I'm well enough. Don't you bother about me. I'm going to take Belle home now."

"The nurse has gone there."

"Yes, we saw her, and told her we'd follow."

Belle looked regretfully over to the bed.

"He'll be sorry when I'm gone."

"How long have you been here?" asked Daniel.

"Since the day before yesterday. I came up straight from Batchelors'."

"No—not straight," broke in Ernley. "Dan, she went up to the pond, and she walked in—my Belle—and then when the water was all up round her, she couldn't . . . so she came out, all dripping wet, and crawled in here, thinking she might dry herself at the fire. . . . And the old chap thought she was his daughter, and she felt so glad of a little kindness that she stayed, and tried to make herself think it was true. You did, didn't you, Belle?"

"I was silly," she murmured.

"No, not silly; it was I who was . . . who'd driven you to this so hard that you wished you were Ellen Gadgett, nursing your old sick father."

"When the nurse came, I went and hid in the lean-to. She came twice a day."

"And how long ud you have stayed," asked Daniel, "if we hadn't found you?"

"I dunno—I didn't think. Reckon I was cruel, but I thought nobody cared about me."

"You knew I cared."

For the first time he had called their attention to his tragedy. Her eyes suffused.

"I'm sorry, Daniel."

"We've treated you badly," said Ernley. "But, Dan, if you'll let us, we'll try and make it up to you."

"We can't," said Belle, more wisely.

Daniel said nothing. He turned away from them and hid his face in the coverlet of the old shepherd's bed. When he looked up, they had gone out together.

§ 4

He spent the rest of the day with Gadgett. He had not the courage to go home and tell his family that he had found Belle and lost her forever. He would wait and let the story reach them first, as it would by inevitable conduits before night. Also, he was sorry for the poor old man waking to find himself deprived of his daughter. But in this respect he need not have troubled, for Gadgett woke up forty years later than he had fallen asleep.

"That you, Ma'as Sheather?"

"It's me, Mr. Gadgett."

"Well, I call it more'n uncommon kind for you to have called around to see me, and if you'll go over there to the fireplace and turn your back on me for a minute I'll show you what only a few has seen."

Dan, in obliging apathy, turned his back. A few moments later an inarticulate sound came from the bed.

"Are you ready, Mr. Gadgett?"

There was no reply, but a kind of summoning croak, and when Daniel turned round he knew the reason. Mr. Gadgett was wearing his teeth.

For a moment Dan, too, was speechless. He had forgotten all about the teeth, and even if he had remembered them and the shepherd's promise to show them to a good boy, he would have been surprised. The sight before him was truly an astounding one. Mr. Gadgett had set out not only to supply nature's deficiency, but to improve on her perfect work. Instead of thirty-two teeth he had fifty, twenty-five in each row. The result was a grin of terrible magnitude. . . . Daniel gaped. It was lucky that he was feeling so miserable, or he might have laughed. When he considered that the wonder had been given its proper due of amazement,

the old man's jaws worked convulsively as he freed them to express his satisfaction.

"Wunnerful, ain't it?"

"Surelye, Mr. Gadgett."

"You never thought to see such a set of teeth. A dentist couldn't do it more fine."

"That he couldn't."

"It's took me nigh on ten year, getting 'em all together and fixing 'em proper. And now I mun be thinking of having my likeness took; but I'm that stiff in my böans maybe it'll be some days before I'm upon the hill—let alone I get into the town."

"How are you feeling to-day?"

"I feel valiant, save as there's aches in all my böans, and the power is agone from my legs. I ask the Lord how I am to follow the sheep on the hill if he takes the power out of my legs, like this?"

"Reckon you'll be all the better for a good long rest."

"I'm not so set on that. I'd sooner be out wud the sheep on the hill. But it ain't reasonable to expect it of me, and I've always understood as the Lord is praaperly reasonable."

Dan said nothing, feeling uncertain of the matter.

"There's that nurse is an unreasonable woman," continued the old man. To think of me come down to having a nurse, and I done for myself this last twenty year. She's all for putting things where they don't belong, and the trouble I've had wud her notions you'd never believe: 'I'm biling kettle for your hot water, Mr. Gadgett, to give you a bit of a wash.' A bit of a wash! And she washes my chest and my back, which no mortal Christian ud wash between October and May—and she calls that a bit of a wash. . . . I'm like to take my death of cold wud her bits and tricks. . . . She's an unreasonable woman, wot shall never see my teeth."

Daniel was beginning to feel drowsy in the little room, full of thick green sunshine and crowded furniture. A fly was buzzing against the window-pane, and seemed to be the voice of the stuffy afternoon.

"If I cud only get out to my sheep. . . . The young woman ull be unaccountable put about wud me laid up here. There's that fool Botolph's got'em now. . . . Reckon he'll have 'em all straggled—and the lambing just upon us. . . . I mun be up for the lambing."

"You'll be up, sure enough, Mr. Gadgett."

"I mun be up, surelye: or . . . this is a tarble thing to have happened to a poor old man past seventy year. I'm fretted after my sleep . . . Have you see my gal, Ellen? She was here just now . . . the one who's in service at Place . . . but maybe it wasn't her—I disremember. Not an illness had I as boy or man, and now in my old age it comes upon me. Howsumever, I'll always say as the Lord ain't unreasonable, and I'd have naught against him if I cud get out to my sheep . . . before that fool Boltolph spiles their fleeces . . . He'll get 'em all straggled. . . . I wish you had 'em."

"I've never had anything to do with sheep. I'd be worse than Botolph."

"Wot? Ain't you their shepherd-boy at Place?. . . . No, now I see as you ain't. But I know who you are, and I know you're good wud all beastses . . . beastses and children. . . .I seen you."

Dan's heart suddenly tightened. He thought of Leslie and Ivy at Brakey Bottom, and he could not bear the thought. He would never be anybody's father now. . . . He leaned his head against the bedpost, not troubling any longer to hide his misery. After all, Mr. Gadgett was scarcely there. He had gone back to live in yesterday.

But the old man seemed to have noticed that something was wrong.

"What ails you, lad? Do your böans ache?"

"It's my heart that aches, Mr. Gadgett. I've had trouble."

"Trouble . . . trouble . . . so have we all."

"Have you had trouble, Mr. Gadgett?"

"Surelye—trouble on trouble. . . . Howsumever, I'll always say as the Lord is properly reasonable."

§ 5

When the time came, Dan was both sorry and afraid to go. He had enjoyed a certain amount of peace, pottering about the house and looking after the old man. At the George there would be nobody to look after; on the contrary, everyone would be looking at him . . . who had helped find Belle for Ernley.

He dragged out the walk over the down as late as possible. The day was out, and the sky was a-swim with stars. From the back of Firle he looked down on two valleys full of mist. Already some of the richness of spring was in the night, and he felt some of it mocking him in his blood. He knew how all these scents of earth and grass and growth, this softness in the air, might have flowed like sap through his love for Belle, quickening it towards flower and fruit. And now instead it was in him as a thirst, stirring up desire towards a void. . . . As he walked through the mocking urging, sweet spring night, Dan understood a little more about his fellow men, about those stumblings, those sinkings, those reactions which before had perplexed and sometimes disgusted him.

When he came to the George, there was only one old man in the bar besides his father and Chris. He had rather hoped for a crowd in which he could be lost.

Tom Sheather beckoned him, and held him out a glass. Dan gulped it. It was seventy-five per cent whiskey. His father must know.

"Still, it's better than if she'd drowned herself, poor creature," he whispered to his son.

"Of course, it's better. I'd lost her anyway, so I'm glad she's found someone. . . . Have you seen Ernley?"

"No—but Chris saw Maudie Harman. She told him she reckoned they'd be married in a week."

Chris walked out of the bar, whistling "Who's Baby are you?"

"I'm glad," muttered Daniel into his glass. "I'm glad."

But the deadly thing which had been growing in his heart during the walk home was life-size now. He felt more mad than glad—mad, desperate, as if he must die rather than endure any more of this pain. The future was like a furious face pressed against the window. He saw himself living for the rest of his life with Belle only across the way, unable to find rest for his pain, continuously devoured by the spring in his heart. . . . Oh, God, help me! I'm done!

His eye fell on the open page of a novelette, lying on the counter, left there by a customer and forgotten.

"The two fellows went single-file through the darkness towards the house.

" 'Keep quiet,' hissed Lorimer, as Jack's foot struck an object on the gravel.

"Young O'Connor stooped and picked up whatever it was. It felt warm and sticky. He still grasped it as they came to the house and crouched under the window. A faint ray of light came from under the blind, and he saw that he was holding a severed human finger.

"Lorimer was taking off his shoes. . . ."

It seemed hours later that his father's voice reached him.

"What's that you've got, Daniel? You ain't listening to me."

"A book."

"Well, you never was the one for books. What's this one called?"

Dan reluctantly tore his eyes off the page to inspect the title—*"Crook O'Connor, the Public School Boy.* May I take it up to bed with me, Dad?"

"Reckon you may. I don't know who it belongs to. And you'd better be turning in, Son. You look finished, somehow."

Dan walked out of the room, still reading. Upstairs in his bedroom he shuffled off his clothes and left them in a heap on the floor; then lit his candle and crept between the blankets, the precious volume in his hand. With licked forefinger he found the place, and once more the returning

horror was beaten from his mind. He forgot Belle, her loss, and his loss; he forgot the anxieties of the last two days, his final disillusion, the face of the future pressed against the window. He was in the glorious world of Unreality—peopled by ink-black villains and Gentlemen Crooks, noisy with revolvers and crimson with blood—a world remote from the humdrum sorrows of work and loss, of love for human woman as distinct from the sweet wraiths of print. . . .

Dan was making his first acquaintance with literature. Hitherto he had never read much. The daily paper and occasionally the Bible had been the only exercise-ground of the talent so laboriously acquired at school. But now he was really reading, for his own profit and pleasure. He was not reading as the cultured read—to enlarge his holding in life and art; he was reading as the humble read—to escape and forget. The author of *Crook O'Connor* did not know the rules about split infinitives and mixed relatives; he had no regard for the probabilities or even for the consistencies; the veins of his characters ran sawdust; the life he portrayed had no connection with any actualities on this planet—but he had provided an anodyne for the pain of at least one human creature, and when the last page was turned and the candle had guttered out, the ultimate blessing of sleep.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DANIEL did not wake up till late the next morning. He felt heavy and stupid, as if he had a cold. He rose and dressed himself, and went downstairs, but though the remains of breakfast still lay on the kitchen table, he could not eat, though he poured himself out a cup of lukewarm, bitter tea. He went over and sat by the fire, shivering. His body was definitely afflicted by the stress of his mind, seeking the easy way out through sickness—bed, sleep, forgetting. . . . But Daniel was still alert enough to know that would not do—that however high he pulled the bedclothes over his head, the Crown would still stand across the road.

His mother came in to clear away the breakfast. He heard her bustling about, rattling plates, and opening and shutting drawers.

"Well, you're a nice lazy boy," she said to him—"not down till ten o'clock, and then sitting over the fire and never offering to help your mother—no!"

He did not answer her.

"Sulky!" she cried to him over her shoulder. She had accused him of sulking more than once during the past fortnight.

But she could not goad him into action; he could not even trouble to hide his grief from her, nor the travail of his soul over its new problem—how he was to get away. Belle was lost to him forever. He had never known till then how much of hope had filled the last two weeks. She was lost, and yet in a very short time he would have to endure her daily presence, if he did not get away. . .somewhere. . . far—further than he could ever go . . . away from himself as well as her.

"What's the matter with the boy?"

She had come to the fireside, to lift the lid off a saucepan, and she saw him huddled and smitten.

"What's the matter with the great boy?"

His whole being turned towards her, longed for her, cried to her. . . .

"Mum!" . . .

She looked startled. His thick voice and working face made her lose her usual critical manner. He saw her change and soften, and the last of his control was gone. He threw his arms round her as she knelt by the fire, and hid his face on her shoulder.

"Danny—what is it? What's the matter?"

She held him to her, rocking him gently. It was years since she had held him so.

"What is it? Tell Mother, Dan."

"Oh, Mum . . . you know."

"It's that Belle Shackford."

"You've heard?"

"That she will marry Ernley Munk—yes. But it does not matter."

"Oh, Mother—my heart's broken."

"Nonsense—a fine boy like you—you'll soon get another girl."

She had him close in her arms, and she could feel how strong and plump he was—well made, his bones well covered, a fine man for any girl.

"But I don't want anybody but my Belle."

"You'll forget her, child."

"Oh, never. Oh, Mother—I loved her . . . and I thought she loved me."

"Well, you're well rid. She is *vagabond*. It never please me you not marry a good girl."

"Mother, you mustn't say that; don't you miscall her."

"Now don't you speak rough to me."

She was angry—she pushed him off her shoulder. They both stood up.

But he could not bear that she should lose her gentleness;

he would humble himself to keep her tender. He came towards her and offered her a kiss.

"I wasn't speaking rough—leastways, I didn't mean to. I'm sorry, Mother."

She let him kiss her, and patted his hand, softening again. They sat down together on the horsehair sofa.

"Mother, I want to go away."

"Away, boy—where? Why?"

"I can't live here . . . with Belle so close . . . and with Ernie . . ."

"But where would you go? And what shall I do without your week's money?"

"You won't have me to keep, and I'll have to work wherever I go, so I can send you money."

"You're a great silly boy. Why should you go away?"

"I can't bear to go on living here and seeing Belle married to Ernie."

"You need not see her."

"How can I help it, with her only across the road? . . . Oh, Mother, I must go away till I've got over this. I can't stay. I must go. . . . I must, I must."

He was getting almost hysterical, and growing angry again. She forgot he was her grown-up son, and took him by the shoulders, shaking him till his sleek lick of hair fell into his eyes.

"You be quiet—you're like a little boy—you deserve me to whip you."

"I want to go away. I can't bear Chris. . . ."

"Chris—you shall not speak rough of Chris! Well, I tell you—you shall go away—for a bit of time. I will write to my brother Philip and ask him to have my silly boy live with him a while."

"In Sark?"

"That will be far enough—no?"

Sark—and he had thought of Brakey Bottom. For a moment dim memories stirred. . . . He saw himself playing

with a lobster's claw. . . . Then came a swell of solemn seas. . . .

"You were four years old when you came from Sark. Do you remember?"

"Not much."

"It is my country—your country. It do you good to go back there for a bit. I write to my brother Philip. I have not written for ten year."

"Perhaps he won't have me."

"Then you can't go. But I will write, and he will have you. It is a good plan. Perhaps if you go, you marry a Sark girl and no more be English. I am not English and wish my children were not."

"I'll never marry anybody but Belle."

"Then you'll marry nobody, since she's to marry Ernley. There, there . . . you shall go away across the sea and forget your trouble."

He sat beside her on the sofa, stupid and bewildered. The saucepan on the fire boiled over and she sprang up to save it. He watched her little darting figure. Yes, she was foreign, his little mother . . . and so in a way was he, though he loved the valleys of the Ouse and the Cuckmere. . . . There was a queer, faint stirring in his heart for the land where he was born.

PART II

THE ISLAND

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

ST. MALO guards those seas which lie on the west of Cape de la Hague, in the gulf which Normandy and Brittany make together. They were part of his bishopric of wild waves, their islets are crowned with the ruins of his monasteries, and in legend he himself sits upon the Ortac Rock, watching the fisher-craft go by, lifting for them his intercessions against the storms. His name wanders through many an uncouth speech: in Sark he is Magloire, further down his own coast he is Maclou, and far away across the sea, where West Barbary sinks into drowned Lyonesse, he claims St. Meliarne's banner as it hangs in Mullion Church. And as his name and legend wander he becomes many strange things—giant and monster as well as monk and Bishop. Nevertheless, we will claim his merits and intercessions, for those are treacherous seas, and the fanged rocks devour the little craft on which man goes out to seek his bread. Holy Malo—Magliore, Maclou, Meliarne, Mullion—pray for us.

On a May morning the colourless sky hung low over St. Malo's sea, and a great stillness and cold held everything. There was no life upon the water, no wind, only a great stillness and cold.

Far away in the southwest, where sky and sea were woven together in mist, an eye shone—flashed—and disappeared. It might have been the eye of great Malo himself, looking out on his domains. Once more it broke out of the mist—beamed, and was gone. It was the only light in all that dullness, the only colour in all that grey. Again and again it flashed—departed—came and went. . . . Daniel, sitting

on his bag on the second-class deck, asked a sailor what it was.

"That?" said the sailor—"that's the Casquet light."

"A lighthouse?"

The sailor looked at him commiseratingly.

"Never heard of the Casquets?"

Yes—he had heard his mother speak of them.

"That's where the boats go down," said the sailor. "There's a current pulls from them rocks, and in a storm the craft goes into them like moths into a candle."

"Have there been many wrecks?"

"Many!" the sailor laughed. "Never heard how the *Stella* went down?—and she was only the big noise. There was all the little ones that never got into the papers—all the French trawlers and the island boats that don't get written about."

He went off about his work, leaving Dan staring into the fogs with their golden eye. Now he could distinguish a tall purplish column. That must be the lighthouse. It was like the lighthouse at home, on the cliffs above Birling Gap, but taller, more graceful, more sinister. . . . He could see the rocks beneath it now, the rocks on which it stood—huge, smooth, helmet-shaped rocks, like the heads of some monster coiled under the sea. . . . The Casquets were falling away into the east, as the *Cesarea* throbbed past them through the calm sea. . . . The sky was turning red behind them, and they and the column of the lighthouse were purple against the glow. The orange light winked in a crimson and purple sky. Colour had suddenly taken possession of the sky, and ran out over the sea. . . . The sea was blood-red, the Casquet rocks were black. The orange light became smoky, furious. . . . It seemed to fight the kindling sea and sky. . . . It gave one last flash upon its pedestal, and went out.

It was sunrise, but the moon had not yet set. Her papery, waning crescent hung over some new islands which had sprung out of the West. The *Cesarea* was ploughing her way towards them. Behind her dragged the white furrows

of the sea, and the great stream of the smoke from her two smokestacks, fuming along the sky among the last stars.

§ 2

A town lay asleep between two horns. On the end of each horn was a castle, which also seemed asleep, and behind the town rose a wooded land, with one high tower above the trees. The decks were crowded all round Daniel; people pushed about him, swinging bags and cases against his knees. Bells rang, sailors cried "By y'r leave," great coils of rope ran out into the sea. . . . Voices shouted from the harbour side and from a little boat riding beside the buoy. Grasping his ticket in one hand, the handle of his bag in the other, he slowly pushed and jostled his way ashore.

This was Guernsey, and a fine place it looked—houses, churches, streets, and castles too. But in the cold morning hour of sunrise and moonset, it seemed foreign and unfriendly. The tall houses with their steep, French roofs were not the houses of home . . . and yet it was here his father had met his mother—in a little house in Bordage, she had told him. . . .

He was on the quay, following the stream of people towards the turnstiles. A great crane was hoisting luggage from the hold of the *Cesarea*—he must wait here for his box. He felt a sudden warm attachment to his box, for it was all that he had of home with him. It held everything he had in the world, except a few clothes in his bag. It was a part of Daniel Sheather in a strange land. . . . Suppose it was lost—suppose it had not come over with him, but lay behind at Southampton. He could not bear the thought—his photographs of the George, of his father and mother, of Chris and Len and Len's children . . . his one or two books—his handkerchief and shirts that his mother had hemmed and marked for him. . . . He could not start here without them all; he must have the old things. . . .

Ah, there it was! He sprang forward to claim it, then

did not know what to do. He asked a porter how he was to cross to Sark—where was the Sark boat? Confusion started. The porter said there was no boat to Sark that day; another porter said there was—nobody seemed to know. A little paddle-steamer was pointed out to him as the Sark boat, and one of the porters was for carrying his box on board, but in the end the Noes had it, for her Old Man was reported to be over at Pleinmont at his sister's wedding.

"But there will be a motor-boat crossing to-night, for visitors have arrived for the *Bel-Air* and are to be fetched," said another porter.

It seemed as if Daniel would eventually reach Sark, though it was just as well he was not in a hurry. His box and bag were left on the quay, and he set off into the town to find a meal.

He thought he would like to go to the eating-house in Bordage, where his father had first met his mother, but though he managed to find the street and walk the length of it, no eating-house was to be seen. He felt as if his mother's romance—his only link with Guernsey—had gone with it.

He ate his breakfast in a little shop in Hauteville Street, and then set out to see the town. It did not interest him much. He saw that it was beautiful and restful and sunny, but his heart was sick for Newhaven Bridge and the weedy, mussle-smelling mouth of the Ouse, for the little tilted rows of slate-roofed houses that swarmed over the lower slopes of the downs, for the street—start of the great white road that led up the valley towards home. . . .

He went into the town church and sat there for a while; but even the church was foreign. Cold and unworshipful, it had none of the homeliness of Bullockdean; even in the last dead weeks he had known that Bullockdean church held warmth and friendship for those who were not too bruised to seek them—for the old women with their prayer-books and the young boys and girls who made sheep's-eyes at each

other. But here one was all among the dead, or rather the dead trappings of the dead, the coats of arms they would no longer bear, the swords they would no longer wear. . . . Memorial after memorial to le Page and le Pelley and le Marchant and de la Condamine and de Jersey . . . griffins, gules, mullets, *bends d'or,* and *bends d'azur*—this was the Cloud of Witness, the writing on the wall of the town church.

He was tired after his long journey and dozing night on the second-class deck: and uncomfortable as he was in his hard pew, he fell asleep, to dream that he was rowing Belle in a little boat round the Casquets, which were plastered with the arms of the best Guernsey families. He woke to find himself being shaken by the Verger, who told him that church was not the proper place to go to sleep in.

Well, where else was he to go? What could he do till four o'clock, when the motor-boat started? He wished he had never come to this unfriendly place where even the Church refused him a lap to sleep in . . . where no one might sleep but the well-born dead. He would be happier at home, even with Belle living just across the road as Mrs. Munk and the Mistress of the Crown. At least, he would have his family at home; here no one seemed to care. Cousin Philip had not even answered his mother's second letter, saying that her son was crossing by Wednesday's boat. Someone might have come over to meet him in Guernsey, to tell him how to get to Sark. There lay Sark, a dim distant land, beyond the nearer coasts of Herm and Jethou. What should he find in Sark?—a family, friends, home, love? No, he had left them all on the other side of the water.

§ 3

The day had grown very hot at noon, and at four o'clock the stones of the Albert Pier were warm with the sun. A white motor-boat bobbed on the tide, and the men within her shouted to one another in an outlandish tongue. They

were loading her with crates and packing-cases and some luggage which had been brought down to the end of the pier. She must be the Sark boat, and Daniel asked if he could cross in her.

He was told that he could do so for ten shillings. This made him very angry, for he had only twelve and sixpence in the world, and did not much relish the prospect of starting a new life on a capital of half-a-crown. He felt that his cousins, who he understood had a boat of their own, might have come over and fetched him and spared him this expense. However, there was no help for it, so he took his seat in the little boat among the well-to-do visitors who had chartered it, and in a few minutes she was chug-chugging out of the harbour, past the lighthouse and Castle Cornet into the Little Russell.

The sea was heavily calm, and the waters had a thick, oily quality—they went in heavy, dull blue rolls across the Russell, as some force passed deep under them, never breaking their blue oily surface. The tide was low, and the great buoys stood out of it, dripping with seaweed, and the foundations of rocks, tide-stained and sea-weed hung. Used to the Sussex cliffs, the misty whiteness of Birling Gap, Dan watched in astonishment those rocks, as the little *Rose Carré* flew past them. The sea was full of rocks—great rocks like castles, raising their turrets on pillared bases—pillars that the sea had carved. In colour they were pink and brown, against the oily blue of the sea and the clearer blue of the sky that rested on the sea.

He sat there tired and silent on his box, watching the calm beauty of the sea roll past him and the castles of the rocks. They ran by Jethou, steering on l'Etac. Sark was coming out of the sea: it looked like a sea-monster, sleeping on the tide. They drew nearer, and its flanks broke into bays; passing under l'Etac, the bays broke into caves and creaks and pinnacles, the island of Brenière stood out, fierce and eaten with caverns. . . .

"You never been to Sark before?" asked the boatman in charge of the engine.

Daniel shook his head.

"You go to see friends?"

"I'm going to stay with my uncle Philip le Couteur. Do you know him?"

"I know him? Oh, my gar! Yes."

"Do you know if he's expecting me?"

"Oh yes, he is expecting you. He say you come along some day."

This sounded unnecessarily vague after his mother's letter, but Daniel still hoped there would be some one to meet him at the harbour.

"Where is the Pêche à Agneau?" he asked. "Can we see it from here?"

"No, it is on the other side. Now we go past La Coupée."

Young Sheather looked up at the towering cliffs, carrying their seamed brownness up against the glitter of the dustless sky. Could anyone live on this desert place, hard, fierce, scored, and scaley as the hide of a dragon.

"Are there houses on the top?"

"Oh, my gar, yes! Plenty houses," and the boatman laughed.

The *Rose Carré* was running only a few yards from the coast; the Point du Derrible fell away straight into deep water. Close to Daniel's staring eyes was a mass and terror of rocks, columns, caverns, points, blocks, walls, crags, gullies, every possible formation, heaping itself round the point, with the water lapping against it, oozing and plopping in its crannies with a faint glug-glug, rolling in and out of its caverns with a hollower, booming sound. As the boat ran by, the echoes of the engine sent up clouds of herring-gulls from the rocks, while on the smaller rocks beyond the point little parliaments of cormorants sat solemn and undisturbed.

"Very dangerous here," said the boatman, laughing again,

but Daniel was not frightened. He did not know enough about seafaring and this particular coast to be frightened. Later, knowledge would teach him fear.

The boat dodged her way through the deep channels into the harbour. The tide just allowed her to creep in. Daniel climbed up the green, oozy steps on to the quay. The little harbour was ringed all round with cliffs of that brownish pink with which he was now growing familiar: there was no way out of it save by a tunnel cut through them.

He looked round in vain for some signs of a greeting. A few boatmen and fishermen were leaning against the harbour walls, and a cart had come down from the hotel to fetch the visitors' luggage, but no one seemed to have come to meet Daniel Sheather. He felt chilled and lonely: the rich, rather terrible beauty of the place, so foreign to his Saxon eyes—used to the tame, sweet landscape of the South Downs, with their gentle curves and misty colours—added to his feeling of strangeness. This island was unfriendly—a strange land, though the land of his birth.

He went up to an old man, and asked him if he could tell him the way to Philip le Couteur's house, but this led only to a fresh baulk. The old fisherman could speak no language but his own—the harsh, disfigured remnant of the speech his Norman ancestors had left him, as they had left him their red hair and sea-blue eyes. It was a foreign language to Daniel, though he must have often heard it, indeed must have spoken it as a child. Luckily a younger man came to help him, and he gathered that the Pêche à Agneau was at the remotest end of the island, across the Coupée in Little Sark.

"How am I to get my box there?"

Nobody seemed to know. But everybody seemed very much amused: they seemed to relish the prospect of Dan's being left in the Creux Harbour with the big, corded box he wanted to carry to the Pêche à Agneau. It was not a cruel or malicious amusement—merely the delight of primi-

tive man in another's misfortune, but it did not help Daniel to feel at home.

At last it was discovered that La Belle Hautgarde had sent their mule cart to fetch stores which the *Rose Carré* had brought over. The great lurching mules came through the tunnel in the midst of the discussion, and after a good deal of argument with the driver, it was arranged that Daniel should be taken in the mule cart as far as La Belle Hautgarde, from which it would not be difficult for the le Couteurs to fetch his box.

He accordingly drove off. With a great clatter and clank of hoofs and wheels the cart went through the tunnel, and then suddenly the landscape melted. . . . Fierce brown cliffs, rocks, columns, and caves gave place to gentle banks smothered in cow-parsley, campion, and bluebells. Trees bowered over head, their leaves spattered with filtering sunlight. A soft air blew, thick with the scent of flowers. He had broken through the frowning walls of Sark and found a flower garden. It was as if a fierce, terrible face had suddenly and beautifully smiled.

Then he began to remember. . . . Scents became familiar, that scent of evening and flowers and warm, sweet grass. . . . He remembered thatched roofs with queer crinkled edgings of tiles, cows with sleek, mouse-coloured skins, an avenue of trees, a windmill. He had forgotten the cliffs of Sark, the barriers which, as a child, he could have seldom or never seen, but he had remembered the heart—the deep lanes, the trees, the flowers, the daily sights of the child who had played with the lobster's claw. . . .

The road narrowed. The island narrowed. Sark was only six feet wide. On either side the cliffs fell away, down into sinister bays, hundreds of feet below. Dan was frightened at last. He grasped the sides of the cart, as it lurched over La Coupée, and then up the steep hill beyond it into Little Sark.

Once more the island spread, and the fields were full

of trefoil, cropped by cows. Thatched roofs ran longside the lane. They had come to La Belle Hautgarde, and Dan must dismount, and go on his own legs to the Pêche à Agneau.

"What about my box? Where can I leave it?"

"Leave it? Where should you leave it, if not here?" asked the driver, who had deposited the box in the lane. "The sons of Philip le Couteur will come and fetch it some time."

"But is it safe?"

"Yes, it is safe. We are honest in Sark—we are not English."

Dan did not know whether he ought to take offence at this last remark, but he had not much spirit left, and risky and grotesque as it seemed to leave his box lying in the road, he submitted to the inevitable, and walked off, to find as best he could his way to his uncle's house.

§ 4

Perhaps the driver was right in his distinctions between Sark and England, for the box was still lying unharmed and apparently unnoticed in the lane when Daniel and two of his cousins called for it after supper. Dan and they were still in the stage of suspicious investigation: Peter was not unlike his English cousin, with his black hair and eyes, though instead of Dan's flat Saxon features he had the sharp nose and chin of the Guernsey-diluted le Couteurs; but Helier belonged to the Norman type of his Hamon mother, and had the thick curley red hair and blue eyes and a ruddy freckled skin. Luckily both boys could speak English fluently, though the Saxon drawl and the French clip nearly built Babel out of the conversation.

"There you box. It is safe," said Peter. He seized one end and swung it up; Dan laid hold of the other and could scarcely lift it. This was humiliating.

"Let me," said Helier, and swung up the other end. They

both swung the box to their shoulders, and signalled to Dan to come round to the side and take his lesser share of the burden.

"We carry it like a coffin," said Peter, and they both laughed.

The Pêche à Agneau was only a couple of furlongs from La Belle Hautgarde, below the brow of the hill, looking out nearly west towards the Moie de la Bretagne. Like most dwellings in Sark, it was a collection of small, separate cottages gathered round a well. Philip le Couteur and his family lived in one cottage, Eugene le Couteur and his family in another, and the third cottage was inhabited by a daughter who had married back into the Hamons and whose husband was in partnership with Philip and Eugene. There must have been more than twenty souls in that little desolate group of houses on the cliff edge, and it was not surprising that accommodation was scarce and Daniel had to sleep in the same room as his cousin Peter.

He found the mass of his cousins exceedingly confusing; they were so numerous that they seemed to have exhausted the supply of Christian names on the island—Eugene and Philip le Couteur each had a son called Philip, and the community also contained three Eugenes and two Peters. Add to this a strong family likeness, born of generations of intermarriage (which had not seemed, however, to affect the hardiness of the stock), an incomprehensible speech, and the complete promiscuity of all three families, and the result was complete bewilderment for poor Daniel.

However, they had given him an excellent supper of fish, bread and butter, and gâche—a soft, sweet cake full of currants, which he liked very much. When supper was over and the box had been fetched home, they left him to himself and the welcome freedom to go straight to bed.

He felt tired and strained, not only with the journey, but with the effort of adapting himself to such entirely new surroundings, though doubtless memory and heredity both helped him a little. He was too tired for satisfying sleep;

also he had been given what his uncle Philip called an English bed, which meant a bed with broken springs, uneven legs, and mattress stuffed with what felt like lumps of wood. His cousin slept in a Sark bed, which was like a large flat box without a lid, full of gaily-coloured bedding. Dan realised that, though his uncles were exceedingly well-to-do, the discomfort of this new life would probably be much greater than that of the poverty-stricken George. However, he was of an adaptable nature, and shrugged down into the misery of the English bed, pulling the ends of the pillow over his ears and the blanket over his eyes, to shut out the strange world which moonlight was now making stranger.

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

HE woke early, to find the room full of sunshine and stir. The stir came from the sea, which moved in a solemn roar over the rocks below. He sat up and listened to it. How the murmur swung! as the wind drove it landwards and then let it fall back into a sigh. His heart quickened with a love of the sea. . . . After all, had not his fathers sought their bread upon the waters for many generations? . . . He slipped out of bed and looked out of the window. There lay the sea, a soft sun-dazzled blue, calm enough far from the shore, but all laced with foam round the coasts and rocks. . . . Its deep tides swelled over its bed, moving solemnly. Only the edges were in commotion.

He moved to the chair where his clothes were piled, and began to dress quickly and noiselessly. The sea was drawing him out to it; he must go down to it, close enough to smell it, to feel its spindrift on his face. It was queer that the sea had never stirred this emotion in him before—not at Birling Gap, where the little wavelets rippled on the wet mirror of the sand, not in the haunted desolation of the Casquets, nor even in St. Peter Port, with the fishing-boats at anchor under the White Rock. . . . It was not till he had come here that the deep had called to him, not till he had heard its voice from the house where he was born.

He ran out of the house as soon as he was dressed. Either somebody was up before him, or the door had never been shut, for he found it open. His footsteps rang on the cobbled stones of the courtyard, in the midst of which the well was wreathed in climbing roses. Round it the little houses and barns, their thatched roofs sprouting with stone-

crop and scabias and coloured mosses, had a charming look of Arcady asleep; but Daniel had ceased to rest in the rustic beauty of the island's heart: he wanted the edges, salt and rough, seamed, worn, cavernous, spiked and deadly, the workshop of the sea.

He found a path that wound over the brow of the cliff, and then stopped short above a slide of rock. The descent looked easy: the rocks were granite, rough, and sure of foothold, and were moreover broken up into blocks and ledges. He let himself down, and as he had a strong head, found little difficulty in the scramble. He was soon only a few feet above some flat rocks full of pools into which the sea was breaking.

Looking down from above, he could see the rich green life of the pools, their purple fringes of seaweed, and their great red and green jewels, which he supposed must be sea anemones. Below the slabs the tide was roaring, sending up lashings of foam. He would swing from his hands and let himself down—it wasn't much of a drop.

It was more than he thought—a matter of seven feet. He was now well below the level of high tide, and the rocks were covered with thick greasy seaweed—the *vraic* which makes a livelihood for the lonely men of Pleinmont. . . . His feet slithered on it, and he found it best to crawl about from pool to pool. His throat tightened as he looked down into those little gardens of the sea—their rocks, their trees, their flowers, their tiny inhabitants swimming in their alleys. He had never seen anything so lovely, so complete. He forgot that he had come out to watch the splendour and fury of the waves below. This was fine: he could mess about here all the morning, but he supposed his uncles would want him to do some job or other with the boats. My! but they'd have to teach him a few things . . . he to work in a boat, who had always worked in a bar!

The waters of the little pool swirled suddenly as the sea poured into them. It was a pity the tide was coming in . . . Losh! but it had come in a good way since he'd been on the

slabs. . . . Things moved quicker here than at Birling Gap. . . . He'd better. . . . But he couldn't. He had dropped off the rock, which now curved outwards above him, shutting off his escape that way.

He looked round for other ways, but could see none. The sea was all round the slabs, breaking over them. There was only the way he had come, and that was impossible from below. What a fool he had been; he might have realised that the rock curved inwards at the root. . . . Perhaps the tide would fall back before it reached him. No—for the seaweed was above his head, hanging from the eaves of the rock seven feet above the slabs.

He felt his skin go rough, and then cold and sweaty. He felt himself shouting for help, but the sea was drowning his voice in a great roar. He was afraid, mysteriously, of more than death. There was something horrible and malevolent in this submerging coast. The very smell of brine and seaweed was sinister with its hint of corruption. . . . "Help! Help!" He could not die here. He would die anywhere but in this place.

He had faced death before—he had lain sick but disciplined under shell-fire in France. This was worse—infinitely worse. Shell-fire was nothing—it was only death. This was worse than death, for he was afraid not only of death but of the forces that were dealing death to him. "Oh, deliver us from evil. . . ." He must not die in the slime. . . .

A loud laugh sounded from the rock above.

"Peter!"

"You cry 'help'?"

"For God's sake get me out of this."

"Idiot!" Peter laughed again. "You be drowned if you stay there."

"I can't get up."

"I cannot get down. I go—I fetch a rope."

"But won't the tide be up before you're back?"

"Oh, my gar, no!"

He walked off with maddening deliberation.

"Peter, don't leave me here!" Dan called after him foolishly, but Peter did not stop to listen.

Once more he was alone, and once more the horror was like a hand upon his throat, choking the breath out of it. His tongue parched and his eyes swam. He tried to think of other things—far-off homely things of the Ouse Valley, of nature cloaked and veiled and decent, but they were as shadows on glass, and could not hold his mind's eye from its terror, from the dreadful strange things all round him, from nature indecent and exposed, shocking and horrifying him as he crouched there on his rock. He tried even to think of Belle, whom he had tried so hard not to think of for a month or more: the thought of her might give him a more wholesome sickness. But even Belle to-day was as a shadow on glass—his most poignant thought of her could not draw him away into the dignities of human sorrow. He could only cower and grovel before the horror of the sea, and those things which the sea exposes on some evil coasts. He now knew that he was not afraid of death—that death itself was only a shadow on glass.

Peter returned just as the slabs were coming awash. He brought with him a rope and two Philips, and they soon had Daniel up beside them among the pink stars of the thrift. He was trembling all over, which amused them very much, and the next moment was violently sick, which amused them more than ever. Their English cousin was very funny—oh, my gar, yes!

§ 2

Daniel was rather ashamed of himself and of the terror he had shewn. He did not like the way his cousins laughed at him—the way they had of saying for days and weeks afterwards: "You go down to-day to Rouge Caneau? You like it down there on the rocks." But he never could bring himself to look upon his terror as quite unreasonable:

during the next few weeks he felt it again more than once —down in the bays, below the high-tide level, among the hanging seaweed and cold slipperiness of the rocks. He felt as he sometimes used to feel at home in the churchyard—a feeling of "run away or the ghosts will get you." . . . though here it was not ghosts, but something which prowled in that wet place between the tides, and lived in the caves that for half the day were full of water and for the other half were full of wind.

But he was not always afraid, for there was also the warm flowery heart of the island, with its farms and its windmill and its ilex-sheltered lanes. There was the loveliness of the Dixcart Valley, where the ferns stand four feet high beside the stream; there were the marguerites pouring over the edge of the cliffs, and the foxgloves making purple flame at Les Orgeries and on the headland which the English call the Hog's Back and the islanders call Château des Quenévés. The coasts were lovely too—as long as you kept away from their roots—with their columns of rosy rock, their promontories like horned beasts, and above all with their distant view of islands and the golden coast of France.

Daniel soon learned to know this new complete little country, to know with thoroughness its five or six miles of road, with less assurance its twenty-five miles of coast. He was right in thinking that his cousins would want him to help them in their boats, and he learned to be useful, quicker than either he or they had expected. Fundamentally adaptable and with sea-going blood in his veins, he soon learned, in spite of his initial terror, to handle a boat whether propelled by oars or engine. His uncles owned quite a little fleet—a cutter, two large motor-boats, a small motor-boat, and several rowing-boats. They used these for fishing, taking goods and passengers to and from Guernsey and even Jersey, and also for taking visitors on pleasure-trips round the island and to visit those caves which could be reached only from the sea.

Daniel was happy enough on the sea, for those were the days of summer calm, when the teeth of the coast were harmless as the teeth in the jaws of a sleeping animal. He loved the soft, wind-driven glide of the boat over the still waters of Havre Gosselin; he loved the gentle rocking beyond La Pêcheresse, or those moments at anchor off La Genetière, when he and his cousins let down the lobster-pots to the bed of the sea, or drew them up after old-man lobster had had time to fulfill his certain folly, and would be found sitting grey and disconsolate in his wicker prison.

His uncles never went a-fishing. Philip had charge of the Guernsey trade, and went to and fro about five days out of seven, either with goods or passengers; and Eugene, who was about ten years older, and had been beaten by the winds into still older looks, now-a-days spent most of his time on land, attending to the farm with his son-in-law Hamon, though he was fond of boasting the exploits of his seafaring days.

Eugene le Couteur was the most uncivilised member of all that household, whose civilisation ranged from two old uncles, unable to read or write and with English limited to a few guide-book phrases for the visitors, to cousin Thomas, Philip's son, who had once been to England, and ever since had worn a bowler hat on Sundays. Uncle Eugene hated England and the English; the only place he hated more than England was Guernsey, and he never wearied of complaining of the opportunity which had been missed during the Great War, when "the Royal Navy could have smashed Guernsey as easy as a crab's back."

"We could have smashed Guernsey, but Germany we could not smash—it was a waste."

"We did smash Germany, Uncle," said Dan, who had come to pick up enough of the island speech to help him through a conversation.

"We did not smash Germany quite small; they are still there, and owe us a lot of money. We should have smashed

Guernsey quite small, so that they could not owe us any money."

"Well, we smashed Germany quite small enough," grumbled Daniel, annoyed at this reflection upon him as a soldier. He was the only one of the household who had seen service in France, though Helier and young Eugene had both been on a mine-sweeper, "and each time we blow up they give us a new pair of trousers."

"But what do we want to smash Germany for at all?" continued Uncle Eugene in waxing indignation. "Germany never do us any harm. I have never seen a German. When the war start, a silly, vagabond man come along to me and want to take my big boys to fight the Germans. I say 'I do not want to fight the Germans. They never done me any harm. They never put their lobster-pots on the Minquier Rocks. I am ready to fight the French whenever they put their lobster-pots on the Minquier Rocks, and I am ready to fight Guernsey always. But I have never seen a German, so why should I fight them?' He say, 'then they will come and kill you.' I say: 'They will not. If they come to Sark they come to the north side, to the Eperquerie. If they should try to cross the Coupée into Little Sark—oh, my gar! let them try, and they will see!'"

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

THE summer rose to the solstice, and all the island smelled of hay and flowers, with heavy smells of brine upon the coast. Daniel was not unhappy. His transplantation had been in some degree effective, and his old sorrows no longer seemed so actual to him—they belonged to another life, to another landscape. Besides, his work in the boats absorbed him, drawing his thoughts away from the past and fixing them in the present moment with its demands and preoccupations. If you have twenty-two land-going years behind you, it takes some striving to learn the way of the sea.

His English correspondence was not of a kind to hinder much the good work of forgetting. His family were not letter-writers, and nor, for that matter, was he. He heard once from his mother and once from Len, with scrawls and scratches enclosed to Uncle Dan from Leslie and Ivy. His father did not write at all, nor did Ernley, nor did Belle. The country of the Ouse Valley soon began to live for him only in a few stilted phrases in stiff handwriting on cheap note-paper. By this means he heard that Belle and Ernley had come back from the long honeymoon which had followed their marriage in London—a marriage that had taken place before Dan left England and only a few days after their reconciliation. He could now, if he liked, picture Belle at the Crown; but the picture was again only a shadow on glass. He was like a man standing with his back to a firelit room and staring out of a window through which he sees sea, sky, and islands bright in sunshine; only now and then the movements of those behind in the room become reflected like ghosts in the pane—what he really sees are the sea, sky, and

islands outside in the sun. This did not mean that he never suffered for Belle, for the thought of her often troubled him very much. After all he was still inside the room of his love for Belle, and only looked outside, through the window, at the sea, sky, and islands of Sark. None the less, he had turned his back on her, and saw only her shadow reflected dimly in the new landscape that filled his horizon.

Other events in the Ouse Valey troubled him still less, though they were events which would have disturbed him considerably if they had not, as it were, happened behind him. Apparently, under his father's unguided rule—for Chris only lounged and scoffed and Kitty only scolded—the George was going quickly along those evil ways Daniel had so often preached against in the old times. "He have those wicked men from Lewes giving horses' names to the sailors," wrote his mother, "and the sailors such fools. We shall have the police upon us." He searched her letters in vain for any of the tenderness which had been his first comfort in his sorrow, and which had flickered intermittently through the month that had gone by before his leaving for Sark. But even this lack did not trouble him much.

Strangely enough, the only occasions when he felt really and acutely homesick, not only for his mother and for Belle but for the whole of his life in Bullockdean, were the Sunday evenings when he went to church. None of the islanders went to church in the morning, the morning services being considered English and shunned accordingly; but every Sunday evening farmers and fisherman would assemble together in the ilex-shaded churchyard, dressed in their best blue jerseys and trousers and peaked boating-caps, and wait outside till the little sharp bell had stopped ringing, when they all marched in together and filled the back seats, ready for a quick corporate exit directly the service was over.

"Bien-aimés frères," the clergyman would begin, which Daniel knew was "dearly beloved brethren" in French. Then would follow the whole of Evening Prayer that had become

Prières du Soir by the same token. It was a queer, stiff, superstitious rite, in which strong men found comfort as they bawled French psalms to Anglican Chants, and droned together: *"Je crois en Dieu, le Père tout-puissant, Créateur du ciel et de la terre. . . ."* To Dan it sometimes brought a strange feeling of loss and pathos, as if he were indeed singing the Lord's song in a strange land. He would shut his eyes during the sermon, which he was far too inexpert at the language to understand, and try to imagine himself back in Bullockdean Church, with the soft scent of its old stones in his nostrils, mixed with the moth-killer in Auntie Harman's cape and the general tobacco-and-camphor reek of the Sunday evening congregation. He tried to think that if he opened his eyes he would see a dozen familiar backs before him—Auntie Harman's, Maudie's, Jess's, Willie Pont's, old Pilbeam's, and beyond them Mr. Marchbanks in the pulpit, preaching an English sermon on keeping good company, helping the poor, reading the Bible, and giving honest measure, and other religious practices of an English village. He felt rather guilty with regard to Mr. Marchbanks, for he had promised to write to him, but had not done so. Alas, he was uncomfortably aware that in religious matters he had changed his custom too easily and had given up doing many of the good things his friend had taught him.

Nevertheless, though it made him homesick and regretful, he could not help finding in the hideous little church, with its pitch-pine pews and flat, whitewashed ceiling, a friendliness which he had never found at the Pêche à Agneau. It was here that his mother had married his father, it was here that he had been baptised; and this unfamiliar language was the language of his parents' vows and of the promises his godfathers and godmothers had made in his name. Also, the place was somehow made homely by the memorials of the drowned with which its walls were covered—memorials of de Carterets and Carrés, and Falles, who had gone out in their boats and never returned. Unlike the memorials in the town church over in Guernsey, they did not bear in high

funereal pride the arms or crests or mottoes of the dead, but only in reproachful repetition all round the wall, the plaintive cry of the living—"*Ta voie a été par la mer et tes sentiers dans les grosses eaux—Néamoins tes traces n'ont pas été connues ....*"

§ 2

Later in the summer Daniel was promoted to going out with the visitors. He would take charge of the engine, while one of his cousins steered, for though he was growing daily more expert and familiar with the coast, his sea-lore did not extend to the navigation of those crooked channels which were the avenues of the caves, with their treacherous stud of rocks, the *grunes* and *demies* of stealthy disaster.

Daniel liked the visitors. They were a relief after the le Couteurs' rather primitive companionship. He and his cousins were friendly enough, for he accepted, being gentle, their rough teasing and laughter and queer remoteness from all he was accustomed to; nevertheless, it was good to meet these people with their English talk and their English ways, to listen to them talking ordinary British politics, instead of the parish politics of Sark, to realise that there were other foreign complications besides those caused by the treachery and avarice of Guernsey. He often heard the sort of talk that he used to hear in his father's bar, or in Ernley Munk's bedroom, when he grew dictatorial over the port. . . . Besides, some of the visitors came from places near home—he once took out a family from Eastbourne and heard them speak of Alciston.

The visitors liked him too, for his adaptable humility and pleasant manners; they gave him tips, sometimes very handsome ones, so that during August he was able to send a pound home every week. His cousins were inclined to be annoyed, for they themselves did not think much of Daniel's manners.

"You only touch your cap—you do not take it off," said Helier reproachfully.

"When a lady say she want the boat," rebuked Uncle Philip, "you should not say 'Yes, ma'am,' as you do; it is not polite, though it may do very well in England or in Guernsey. You should say, 'Madame, the boat is yours,' and if she ask what time best to start, you should say, 'When it pleases Madame.' "

In spite of this ornate politeness, on which all the Sark fishermen prided themselves, the le Couteurs did not, like Dan, approve of the visitors in their hearts. They feared lest any of them should want to settle down on the island—"and we have more English." Already several of the farms handed down from the original Forty Tenants were in English hands, and the local families were being driven more and more to the edges, into the second estate of the fishermen, who were unrepresented in the Chef Plès and therefore powerless to withstand the invader.

Perhaps this attitude was partly responsible for the fact that, in spite of his acceptance of their life and customs, the le Couteur family did not really absorb Daniel: he was never quite one of themselves, but remained English and outside them. His father would always be to them the Stranger who had taken away his mother from her kin, and his mother would always be the woman who had forsaken her kin for the Stranger. He had been born in their land, but he had been bred far away. Though he had adopted their customs, they were not really his. Though he no longer wore his English clothes, and though his colouring was the colouring of their race where it touched Brittany rather than Normandy, he had the broad, flat Saxon features of his fathers, of the men of the Saxon fleets who had driven out first the monks and then the pirates from their land.

§ 3

Autumn came, and the visitors went. The seas and caves were a playground no longer but a business of storms

and fogs. First came the equinoctial gales—a smashing of wind against the cliffs, with rain like knives. The sea no longer foamed only at the edges where the great *bæveuses* slobbered the tides. It was a boiling whiteness as far as l'Etac. On the coast all was thunder; the caves roared with water and wind, the boom of the Gorey Souffleur could be heard far out in the Russell, and the screams of the Caverne des Lamentes foretold the winter's wrecks to superstition loitering with stiff hair on the Coupée.

The le Couteurs pulled up their boats. There might be some occasional fishing in calm intervals, but no real business. The Guernsey steamer came only twice a week, and sometimes she was unable to land her cargo and mails. The outer world seemed to recede immeasurably far.

Then, at the passing of the equinox came the fogs. These were more terrible than the storms. The storms were at least a spectacle, but the fogs were one continual white blindness on the land. Those were days in which sight, touch, and smell were sunk in one clammy, salt whiteness, and the only sense which lived was sound. The air was torn with sound, as the fog-horns hummed from a score of rocks. There was the eternal moan of Blanchard, out beyond Les Abîmes; there was the thunder of Platte Fougère—slower, fiercer, seeming to shake the sea; and there was Sark's own voice at Point Robert, which inland was like the drone of a mosquito, but on the coast was like the voice of a trumpet braying judgment—the judgment of the east coast of Sark. Daniel would sit on the cliffs, listening while it swelled with the echoes that poured into it, till at last every cave and rock and cliff-face roared with it, and out in the fogs upon the water the Grande Moie shook it out of his castles.

There was not much for him to do in those days—no work in the boats, very little on the farm, and all the crowd of them to do it. His uncles and cousins smoked and snored beside the fire, and Dan sat with them, bored and lonely. Sometimes he played with Alice Hamon's children—funny

little things, with their queer French talk; they amused him, and when he played with them he felt at home. But you could not be always playing with children.

What else could you do? You could go to the *Bel-Air* and get drunk. It was not a very good thing to do, but you did it sometimes, because there was nothing else. Everyone did it—Uncle Eugene and Uncle Philip, Helier, Peter, William, the young Eugenes and Philips, all the lot of them. They sat with the other fishermen and farmers and drank armagnac, a rather unpleasant brandy, and ampurdam, a kind of heady port—and told each other long stories about themselves and their fishing exploits out beyond the *demies* of *Baleine*. Dan was not really fond of drinking, but it was easy to drink too much armagnac—it soon made his head heavy and then light. Then a strange thing would happen—he would change. He would cease to be Daniel Sheather of the George at Bullockdean, and would become Daniel le Couteur of the Pêche à Agneau, yarning and quarrelling in debased Norman French, discussing Sark politics, *le seigneur, le ministre,* and disparaging England and Guernsey. Some buried local instinct would revive, stripping him of all his years in the Ouse Valley, of all his line of Saxon forefathers, leaving him only his inheritance in the Norman Isle. His very face would change: his features would appear sharper, his eyes brighter, as his mother's blood quickened with the drink that had fired his mother's father. . . . He was good company then, was Cousin Daniel—oh, my gar, yes!

When he had slept off his excitement and awoke a Sussex man again, he would feel ashamed. He would reproach himself not only for these transient disloyalties but for the whole slow system of his forgetting. There was no good pretending that he felt either for his home or for his people the same as he had felt when he first came out to Sark. Even the homesickness of Sunday nights was growing fainter, and *Frères Bien-Aimés* showed signs of becoming the reality of which "*Dearly Beloved Brethren*" was only a

remembered translation. "The Prayer Book was written in French. Helier de Cartaret brought it from Jersey, and then it cross the sea and Queen Victoria say it very good and turn it into English." So Uncle Eugene used to babble in his ignorance, and Dan had secretly scoffed at him. Hadn't he always known that King Henry the Eighth had written the Prayer Book to serve out the Pope for wanting to marry Katharine of Aragon? But now he almost believed in Uncle Eugene's version. His very mind was being swallowed up by Sark and his Sark relations. There were no visitors now to remind him of his own speech and country . . . and after all, he was as much a Sarkie as he was an Englishman. Why should he kick against the pricks? When he was in England he had never troubled about Sark, so now that he was in Sark, why should he trouble about England? Thus he ultimately surrendered.

At Christmas he had some letters which brought him back to Bullockdean for a day or two. His mother sent rather spiteful good wishes to her brothers at the Pêche à Agneau, but no present to her son, for she had reason to believe, she said, that "good things sent to Sark never arrive there." His father, on the other hand, came out of his retirement to the extent of a gorgeous Christmas card of painted talc, adorned with two clasped hands and verses about "the heart which yearns for thee at this glad tide." Len and Emmie sent cards too, and the ghastly fruit of Ivy's first brush-painting lessons at school. His family was prolific in its seasonable wishes, yearning hearts, and mem'ries of his bright eyes, but it withheld the more satisfying gift of news. This was unexpectedly supplied by Jess Harman. She had not written to him since he left home, and he had seen very little of her during the weeks before he came away. But now on this first Christmas of his exile she wrote him a long letter, full of news. That letter nearly stopped his Norman drift. Not that Jess's pen was agile enough to bring before him all the life of the Ouse Valley, coloured and lit up to dazzle his eyes. She revived his ardour by the simple pro-

cess of feeding it with facts—long strings of facts. Each sentence contained a separate and independent fact. Since he had left England Dan had never had such a string of news.

"Old Gadgett is dead. Maudie gets twenty-five shillings a week now. Auntie has bought a new bonnet. She has given her old one to the old gyppo woman that sells clothes-pegs. Mrs. Penny has sent Susie to school and looks after Miles herself, so I do for the Rector now. I get twelve shillings a week. I have bought a silk jumper. Mrs. Pont has had the face-ache. Mrs. Ernley Munk has a dear little baby girl. I should like to be her nurse, but she has a proper one. It was born in Brighton in a nursing home. They have visitors at the Crown for Christmas. They are going to make their own electric light. We are having White-Wilcox in C for Christmas. The ladies' choir will help them out."

So Belle was a baby's mother now. . . . That was the picture that stood out most clearly among all the other pictures of Maudie behind the bar of the Crown, of Jess in her new silk jumper, of Mrs. Pont with her face-ache, of the old gyppo woman in Auntie Harman's bonnet, of the choir rehearsing White-Wilcox in C with ladies helping them. . . . He could see Belle sitting with her baby in her arms, its little head almost lost in the hollow of her big breast, her hair hanging on her cheeks as she stooped over it, busy with the comfortable business of motherhood. He wondered if she was happy. . . . Why of course she was. She was a baby's mother and a man's wife. She was no longer poor distraught, dishevelled Belle Shackford, with her sorrows and gallantries, but well-protected, well-to-do Mrs. Ernley Munk of the Crown Inn, where they had visitors for Christmas and were going to make their own electric light. . . .

It was strange that no one had written before now to tell him of the baby's arrival. He supposed that it had not been so scandalously early as to please his mother, or per-

haps she was still jealous of Belle, and did not want to remind her son of her existence. Ernley might have written, he reflected bitterly, but perhaps Ernley still felt their parting awkwardness. . . . Anyhow it showed how far he was from Bullockdean, that the woman he loved should have borne a child without his having word of it.

That night he dreamed of Belle sitting in a stable with her baby on her knees, while all round her from invisible throats rose the strains of—White-Wilcox in C, given by the particular magic of dreams an appeal so haunting and so wild that Daniel awoke with the tears streaming from his eyes. It was not till some minutes later that he saw anything incongruous in the fact that the words which had been sung to the familiar music were not the words of his Anglican memories but the Writing on the Wall of Sark Church: *"Ta voie a été par la mer et tes sentiers dans les grosses eaux. Néamoins tes traces n'ont pas été connues."*

CHAPTER FOUR

§ 1

THE winter passed, vanishing slowly through a succession of fogs, and once more the seas began to sleep and men to work. There was only what might be called one winter casualty—an Englishman who had taken a house near the Clos Jaon in May, and had so loved October, with the pale lights on Derrible and the yellow calms of the sea, that he had vowed Sark to be a heaven one could be happy in all the year round. The result was that early in February he had been thrown aboard the Guernsey steamer, rolling on her paddle-boxes beside Les Burons, accompanied by such of his personal belongings as did not miss the deck and fall into the sea, and in April had sent for his furniture to be brought to the Gallic civilization of Jersey.

The le Couteurs had the contract for the removal, as he preferred to take the bigger risks of the quicker way rather than the involved and age-long process of sending by Guernsey and the English mail. All three motor-boats were required—the big *Allouette* and the new two-cylinder *Kitty Hamon,* as well as the little *Baleine*. Uncle Philip was to have been in charge of the party, but he had a bad attack of rheumatism shortly before the day fixed for sailing and delegated his command to his eldest son, Philip Junior. This very much pleased the cousins—"We have a good time in St. Helier," said Peter to Daniel—"Oh, my gar, yes!"

On a fine soft morning of late March the run was made. The wild hyacinths on the cliffs were as blue as the sea, and the gorse in the Dixcart Valley was like a mirror of the rising sun. Daniel was in the small boat with his cousins Peter and Eugene, carrying packages and crates of china and

soft goods. He had been eagerly looking forward to the run. After the long imprisonment of winter, with all its dullness and introspection, it was good to feel the wind in his hair, and blowing through his Jersey, drying the sweat of his lading. It was good to feel the motion of the boat, running out like a hare into the Déroute. He was looking forward to seeing Jersey, too. For nearly a year he had seen her dim whale-like shape lying in the south; and he felt that it was high time that he set foot on her shores. The adventure of spring was upon him. He was sick of his confinement in Sark's three by one-and-a-half.

They were to land at Gorey, for Mr. Cleeve's new house was at La Rigondaine, so the little merchant-fleet of the le Couteurs steered straight on the Dirouilles, and then on La Coupe by Rozel Bay. They left the Paternosters to the north-west—Dan saw them standing out of the sea, all knotty and dark with *vraic*—that rosary of death, of which Our Fathers stand up above the water, while the Hail Marys lie coiled beneath. The Jersey coast spread out before them in a panorama of sands and cliffs and woods, while inland the sun was glittering on the glass-houses.

The crossing had taken six hours, and there followed three more hours of unloading and packing the skiff into the vans waiting to take it to La Rigondaine. By the time their work was over all the le Couteurs were tired, and stretched themselves on the warm stones of Gorey Pier. There they lay in a row—big men with red hair and little men with black, all in their blue jerseys and bell-shaped trousers, with their peaked caps over their eyes to keep out the sun. The stones were cold when they awoke, and the sun had blurred into a fiery crimson scar which streaked the back clouds behind Mont Orgueil.

"Too late to go home," said Cousin Philip cheerfully, sitting up.

"There will be a moon to-night," said Ernest Hamon.

"We go back to-morrow," said Philip. "I have not been in Jersey for twenty month. I want to see the place."

"I want to see St. Helier," said young Eugene.
"We go and have a drink first," said Philip.

§ 2

They went and had some drinks at the Rozel Inn. Dan was beginning to feel excited at finding himself in a town, with inns and shops, though in point of size Gorey was not much more than twice as big as Bullockdean. His cousins began to talk about St. Helier, which sounded almost metropolitan.

"Let us go there," said Eugene and William. Ernest Hamon thought it better not. "He has a wife," said William. They all laughed. In the end Ernest went with them, and Daniel found himself in a railway train for the first time for a year.

It stood in relation to other trains very much as Gorey stood to other towns; nevertheless, the experience was exhilarating after so long an abstinence. He had drunk a couple of brandies at the inn, and brandy was stronger than armagnac. He sat in the little jogging train watching the first stars appear in the grey sky, through the smoke of his cousins' pipes. The coast was beginning to light up—the lighthouses were kindled, and great eyes shone solemnly across the narrow tides of Grouville Bay from the Ecureuil and the Azicot. There were other lights too out at sea, and the coast of France twinkled afar off, with lighthouses and beacons, and the dazzles of towns.

On through the solemn dusk ran the little train, past the martello towers standing dark against the still, white sweep of the bay, over Gorey Common and the sophistication of the golf-course, over La Roque Point to the teased shoals of St. Clement's Bay. Then at last they were in St. Helier, with the harbour and the pier and the castle and the streets and the trams, all alight and joyful.

They went first of all to an eating-house and had supper —a wonderful supper of steak and kidney pudding, such as

never was seen at the Pêche à Agneau, where in winter one lived continuously on the ormers picked up under Saignie and Tintageu, with a little tough mutton on Sundays. There were some Breton sailors who knew Philip and Helier, and they came and sat at the le Couteurs' table. It was they who suggested that afterwards they should all go and dance.

Ha! Ha! and oh, my gar!—it was a good idea, though nobody could dance. That only made it all the funnier. Ernest Hamon began to talk once more about going home by moonlight; but nobody would listen to him—they had drunk a good deal of the sour claret stood them by the Breton sailors—and Hamon had never been able to stand up to any of the le Couteurs, including his own wife, so they all went off together in a string, laughing and singing along the Pier Road towards La Folle.

Daniel had only a very dim idea as to where they acutally went. The Bretons knew the way and led them in and out of a multitude of little alleys, by wharfs and warehouses and marine taverns till they came to a kind of hall where a great many people were dancing to a mechanical orchestra. There were sailors of all kinds from the ships in the harbour, fishermen, a few townsmen, a soldier or two from the barracks, who vanished soon and suddenly at a rumour of the military police, and an inadequate number of women and girls.

These were in great demand, as the male dancers were so much in excess of the female. Some of the men were dancing together. Daniel noticed a big, dark, solemn-faced Breton dancing with a sailor off one of the Great Western Railway Company's boats. His cousins at once deserted him in pursuit of partners, and he sat down on a bench against the wall, feeling rather forlorn and shy.

He had danced sometimes as a soldier, and on one or two occasions when Mr. Marchbanks had tried to rouse a little gaiety in his parish by giving a dance at the Parish Room. But he had forgotten his steps, and the present assembly was very different from the decorous "hops" of his military and

parochial experience. The air was full of dust and noise, the scraping of feet, the clack of tongues in French and English, and the four various *patois* of the four largest islands. There was a bar at the end of the room, and most of the partnerless men were drinking there. One of the Breton sailors who had come with the le Couteurs signalled to Daniel and offered him a drink. He could speak no English and Daniel's nearest approach to French was a lame following of his cousin's bastard Norman, so there was not much conversation; but Dan had his first glass of absinthe, which had the effect of making him think he could dance.

Evidently, the other understood the language of a tapping foot and a dark eye roving in the direction of the dancers. Two girls had come up by them, pretty pale creatures, arm in arm. The Breton stood them both drinks, and in a few minutes had paired off with one of them, leaving the other with Daniel's arm round her waist.

"You want to dance?"

"Eh?"

He stared at her stupidly. He could hardly realise that he had been spoken to in English.

"You want to dance?"

"Yes—I should like to."

"You come on then."

She was a little soft thing—soft and light—and it was quite easy to swing her round in spite of his not knowing the steps. But he had an uneasy consciousness of bumping her about rather badly, owing to his defective steering. When the music stopped, they were both breathless and glad to sit down.

"How did you know I was English?" he asked.

"I guess."

"Do I look English?"

"No—but I hear you speaking to your friends and you speak different."

"How do you know I speak different?"

He had spoken only the Sark patois, which she, being a Jerseywoman, would scarcely understand.

"'Because I know how they speak in Sark. My father came from Sark. I am a Falle, though here we call it Falla."

"Oh, you know Sark?"

She shook her head.

"I was never there, but my father was there. I was born in Jersey, in the parish of St. André. My name is Rose, after my mother, who die when I was a baby."

"Do you live with your father?"

She shook her head again.

"No, my father is dead. He die last summer."

There were tears in her eyes and Daniel felt sorry he had asked the question. It was a relief when the sudden bray of the mechanical orchestra drowned all possibility of further talk. He suggested that they should take the floor again, and she consented, though she must have been feeling tired and bruised after their first performance.

They danced together the whole evening. He had no one else to dance with, nor apparently had she, and rather than be alone she submitted to his clumsiness. His cousins had found partners and were lost. He gave her two more drinks at the bar, but they did not seem to affect her as they affected him, perhaps because she had not had so many already. He felt bemused and unsteady. After a time it made him giddy to dance, and they sat down together hand in hand. His cousin Eugene came up to him.

"We meet to-morrow at Gorey Pier—eight o'clock—see?"

"Where are we going to spend the night?" asked Daniel, making a feeble snatch at reality.

Eugene laughed.

"I leave that to you."

Daniel half understood. He looked at Rose Falla, and then angrily at his cousin, but Eugene stepped back among the dancers and was lost. Dan was furious. How dare

that Sarkie swine insult him and his girl? He must have seen that she wasn't that sort. Then suddenly he realised that after all Eugene had a certain justification. After all only one sort of girl was likely to come to a low-down sailors' joint like this. This girl looked young and gentle, but she could not be so ignorant as to imagine she was in a respectable place. She must have come deliberately, knowing what it was. In fact, she must have come for the same purpose as the other girls—to pick up a man. That was it—and he was the man she had picked up. He was a fool not to have realised it. After all, it was only kids who imagined that tarts were always flashy. He'd seen some pretty quiet ones when he was in the army, and they always got off easiest. Think—he'd been two years in the army and yet he'd never let himself in for anything like this. It was all part and parcel of his forgetting his good English ways. . . . Well, he wasn't really in for it even now. He could still get out—and he would. It wasn't at all the sort of thing he wanted. He wanted something different—Belle sitting in a stable with her baby on her knees. . . . He rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I'm going out—I'm going home."

She stared at him, and at his rough words he saw the tears come back into her eyes. At once he grew more gentle.

"Don't be angry. I'm not saying anything against you, but you must let me go. I—I've never been with a girl."

"Nor I with a boy."

For a moment they stood facing each other in a corner of the noisy, crowded room. Then he exclaimed:

"But why are you here?"

She began to cry in earnest. No one took any notice. Tears and kisses, all the private bitter-sweet of love, were common and public already in that hall, where there was no shade to the glaring arc-lights but the dust kicked up by the dancers' feet.

"Why are you here?" he repeated, raising his voice so

that she could hear him above the jangling din of the orchestra.

"I come with my friend Simone."

"But why?"

"Because I must live."

His indignation nearly sobered him. But the fire of his absinthes and cognacs was still in his head, driving thought and action together. He took her by the arm and pulled her towards the door.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Outside. I can't talk to you properly in here."

"You aren't angry with me? You won't leave me?"

"Don't you want me to leave you? I should have thought you did."

She wept. "No."

§ 3

He had shepherded her out into the road, which ran by the sea. He could hear the lap and glug of water against piles, and all the great dark emptiness before him was studded with the eyes of the rocks, winking and turning in the blackness below the stars. He put his arm round his companion and guided her to a seat against the wall of some marine stores. Here they sat down again, he still holding her close to him for warmth, for the air blew keenly.

"Now tell me why you've come here. You aren't that sort, and why don't you want me to go?"

"You mustn't go. If you go I've no one."

"But your friend?"

"She's found a boy, she doesn't want me."

"But where's your home? Where do you live?"

"I live with Simone, the last two days. They turn me out of my room in La Planche, because I have no money. Simone still work where I used to work."

"You poor little thing. Are you out of a job? Have you no one to take care of you?"

"My father die after a long illness that take all our

money, and we not able to pay the insurance, so I get nothing. Then I work for Madame Etienne, in the bodices, but trade is bad, and she have to send away many girls. I go and Simone stay. I can get nothing. I have to go out of my room. For two days I have nothing but bread and tea. Then Simone say I come to her, but she have not enough money for both, as she get only half-time at Madame's. So she say I get a boy to take care of me. That is the only way. She say I come with her here to-night and find a nice boy. She say she will find me a nice boy. She say some boys very nice and gentle and kind and not like the others."

Tears choked her breathless flow of words, and he melted into a furious pity.

"You poor little soul! What a life for you to start on! What a shame!"

"I always been good till now."

"Why, you'd never stand the racket! Simone's a bad lot. You must promise me never, never to go back to that place."

"How can I promise? If you leave me I must go back and find another boy—a rough boy, not like you. When I see you so quiet, I felt so glad and I thought I not mind so much. But now you will not have me, and I must go back."

"Go back? By God, you shan't!"

His brain was still fiery with drink, and he saw himself as this poor little thing's protector, rescuing her from an evil life, establishing her in ease and virtue. He would save her. There was only one thing to do—take her right away, take her back with him to Sark, to the Pêche à Agneau. Alice Hamon would look after her. She could help in the house and on the farm. So cognac and excitement smoothed out his plan. He saw no difficulties in the way beyond a sudden vision of his six cousins standing between him and the boat, saying, "You no bring her—oh, my gar, no." He would have to get her across without his cousins' knowing it; that was all. . . . He could take her over himself in the little *Baleine*. He could manage the *Baleine* by himself—

she was such a small affair. Besides, this girl was island bred, and could probably give him a hand if he wanted it. Anyway, it was the only thing to do. He couldn't let her go back to that hell, and he couldn't take her anywhere in Jersey. He must face the dangers of the Sark crossing for her sake, and no doubt a Providence which approved of pure women and brave men would take care of them both. . . . He stood up, dragging his companion to her feet.

"You're to come with me."

"Where?"

"Home. I'll take you over to Sark."

"But—but——"

"I tell you it's the only thing to do. I can't leave you here by yourself, or with a girl like Simone. If you come to Sark, there'll be plenty of work for you to do in my uncle's house. You can help my cousin Alice Hamon look after the children. Anyways you can't stop here."

"But we can't start now."

"Yes, we can—we must, or maybe that swine Eugene ull stop us. The moon ull be up in half an hour, and the sea's as calm as a lake. I've got a little boat we can easily manage ourselves. Come along at once."

She was evidently of a yielding disposition. That dependence which had made her submit to Simone's judgment and attempt escape by way of prostitution, now made her submit to Daniel's and attempt her escape by way of an unknown sea. She seemed equally willing to risk either her soul or her body at another's behest. Dan hurried her along the sea road out of the town, too fuddled and elated either to feel fatigue himself or be conscious of hers. They would have to reach the harbour before it was light, and they would have to do the whole distance on foot, as the trains had long ceased running. Nevertheless, he was not dismayed.

Rose clung to Daniel's arm, her feet dragging. She had danced most of the evening with a clumsy partner, and her

shoes were cheap high-heeled affairs, absolutely unsuited to the road; but as long as he led, she would follow. Already he was princely in her sight; and when either fatigue or fear or bewilderment seemed likely to overwhelm her, she would lift her swimming eyes to his face and love his short defiant nose and English mouth, and his eyes which were wild with drink and moonlight. The moon had risen as they came to Roque Lavrons, huge and primrose-coloured, gleaming on the wet surfaces of sand in Azette Bay.

They crossed the desolation of Samarès Marsh, and came to Grouville and the golf-course, from which they could see the lights of Gorey Harbour and Mont Orgueil. Daniel wondered if he should have much difficulty in getting hold of the *Baleine*. There would, of course, be a watchman on the harbour. Perhaps he would not acknowledge Daniel's right to her. He must not let him know he was going to sea. . . . He would pretend he was hungry and that he and his companion had come for a feast—he knew there was food on board, some biscuits and tinned beef.

§ 4

"Hullo. *Qui va là?*"

"Le Couteur—pour la 'Baleine.'"

"What do you want her for now?"

"We're hungry, and she's got food on board."

The watchman came out of his hut, sleepy and grumbling, to undo the gate for the English le Couteur and his girl. Daniel wondered a little at the ease with which he was allowed to pass. It was not until some time afterwards that he realised that the watchman would never imagine that even an Englishman could be such a fool as to put out to sea at one o'clock in the morning.

The sea was plopping against the quay, and out beyond the bar Daniel could see the little white horses galloping from France. He found the three le Couteur boats beside the steps, and helping Rose Falla through the big *Allouette* and

the *Kitty Hamon*, he reached at last the little *Baleine*. Here they found a tin of beef and biscuits under a bit of sacking, and crouching together in the bottom of the boat, they ate their meal with a hunger that surprised him, for hitherto he had not thought of food except as a pretext for getting on board. Rose's thin shoes were now in pieces, rags of kid held together by mud. Her little face was dabbled with sweat and her clothes were sticking to her. She was worn out after the dancing and her tramp from St. Helier, and though the food revived her a little she still lay huddled at his feet while Dan prepared for their stealthy putting to sea. In the heat of his knight-errantry he did not notice that his lady had already had enough.

He unknotted the salt, sticky rope that held the *Baleine* to the *Kitty Hamon*. Gosh! But his cousins would be mad when they found out what had happened. Never mind—he would be over in Sark before they could make any fuss. He took the paddle and silently manœuvred his craft under the quay walls. He would not start his engine till he was well away.

The moonlight, gleaming between the piles, fell on Rose Falla's face, showing him for a moment its dreadful whiteness.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"Oh, no—not afraid. I often go to sea with my father."

That was good—she would be able to help him. He ought to make Sark easily. The sea was calm, and both wind and tide were in his favour. He had passed the green light at the harbour's end, steering by the spar-buoy at the Agicot. The moonlight was almost dazzling on the water, and he could see all the rocks standing up out of it, and the spar-buoys at Les Arches and Les Guillemots. For the first time he began to feel a little afraid, as the seawind cleared the fogs from his brain. But he reassured himself—they were quite safe in a boat like this, nothing but a converted row-boat, of the shallowest draught. He needn't start her engine till they were out past the five-fathom line.

The lights of Gorey Harbour now seemed far away. He was able to see the north side of Mont Orgueil, with the red light of the Archirondel Tower shining on Havre de Fer. He was surrounded by *demies* and *grunes* and the roar of water. The *Baleine* drifted between two rocks and he saw the points of another beneath her. This both terrified and reassured him, for he knew that though her course was dangerous, yet her draught was shallow. He would be all right in another ten minutes and could start the engine. What was that red light which had appeared round the point? It might be Le Fara, which they had passed on their way to Jersey.

He had started his engine and drew a tiny ribbon of foam with him out to sea. Almost impudently the little *Baleine* ran out into the mightiness of La Déroute. The wind blew keenly and there was a big movement under the surface of the waves, which gleamed with phosphorescent patches. But the rocks had been left behind, and Daniel had lost his fear—or rather, it had been changed. He no longer felt uneasy about the physical risks of his adventure, but for the first time he saw that it bristled with dangers of another kind. The sea wind had blown him sober, and he began to see his madness soberly.

He looked at Rose Falla crouching for warmth beside the engine, and he wondered what had made him so mad as to bring this girl away. The folly of the voyage was nothing to the folly of bringing her with him. . . . The Paternosters waiting in the northwest were not to be dreaded half so much as the future he had built for himself in that drunken hour. What should he do with Rose Falla? Would his cousins take her? And if they wouldn't, what could he do? He had only a very little money, having sent nearly all his summer's earnings home. He couldn't keep her in Sark if his cousins would not take her in, and was there anything in his whole experience of them to give him even a reasonable hope of their doing so? Moreover, how did he know she had told him the truth? She might be only

a common tart. Or she might have friends, relations in Jersey, who would have the law of him for taking her away like this. Oh, gosh! he was properly in for it! . . . That was the sort of thing you got for drinking too much and going to bad places. It served him right. He'd been well brought up, so there was no excuse. Neither was there any way of getting out of it as far as he could see. He could not put back for Gorey now. He must go on and hope for the best, and in that hour of sober disillusion the best he could hope for seemed that they should hit something and go, the pair of them, to the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

DANIEL and Rose did not go to the bottom, but, not very surprisingly, the *Baleine* did. She went aground long before it was light, on some outlying rocks half a mile from the Paternosters, and for three hours he and his companion sat drenched and silent watching the dawn break behind the eastward mystery of France. Rose saw that her deliverer's mood had changed, that he no longer gloried in his championship, that apprehension and regret had taken the place of daring and indignation. But she would not complain. She crouched beside him on the inhospitable seaweed, her arms thrown over his knees—a drenched, draggled, exhausted Andromeda still unreproachful of her Perseus. He did not speak to her or look at her, but sat gazing down the violet paths of the sea towards the Ecrehos as their cliffs came slowly out of the webs that trailed between water and sky.

At about eight o'clock they were taken off by a steam yacht on her way to Guernsey. The yacht gave them breakfast and the almost terrifying luxury of a hot bath. It dried their clothes and overwhelmed them with amiable enquiries. It was apologetic for its ruthlessness in taking them on Guernsey when they wanted to go to Sark, and paid their fare home by the steamer from St. Peter Port.

Rose was delighted with the yacht and its motherly behaviour. Her native hardiness recovered quickly from endurances that would have smashed an English girl. On the voyage across to Sark in the little paddle-steamer, she laughed and chattered gaily. She was no longer the terrified victim of the dancing hall or the collapsed heroine of the wreck of the *Baleine*. She was a joyful and prattling child

with queer little adorable gleams of womanliness. He saw that she must be even younger than he had first imagined—probably not more than eighteen. Her skin had the living freshness of youth, her eyes its emptiness, her mouth its expectation. As he realised her youth, he lost the consciousness of his own and began to feel himself old. He was clear-headed and he saw that for better or for worse he had appointed himself this girl's protector, and from the decision made when he was drunk there was no appeal now that he was sober. He would have to see her through .... Whatever happened, she must not go back to Jersey and to the inevitable life that awaited her there. Somehow he would have to persuade his uncles to keep her, though his chances, already poor enough, had been almost finally ruined by the loss of the *Baleine,* a catastrophe which he knew the families at the Pêche à Agneau would not accept in the spirit of resignation. There was no good asking himself how he should manage to stand up to Uncle Eugene and Uncle Philip. He must just make up his mind to do so.

No wonder that Rose Falla found him a glum companion; but she was still undismayed. Restored in mind and body, it did not occur to her to fret or even wonder about the future. She did not imagine that this masterful being who had torn her from the dance room at La Folle, swept her out to sea, and had been at least instrumental in bringing about her two hours of fairyland on the yacht, should not be omnipotent in his own domain.

"I love to go to Sark. I love to see Sark. It is my father's place. You know where he was born? It is called La Moinerie."

They were sailing close under the red cliffs of Saignie, and he showed her the jut of Tintageu between Port du Moulin and Pegâne Bay, and beyond it he told her was the Pêche à Agneau where he lived.

"Oh, how lovely—you look out over the sea. Oh, I shall be happy, and I shall learn to talk in my father's way. We will talk together."

He wondered if his cousins would already be home. Probably they would, if they had not wasted too much time at Gorey looking about for him and the *Baleine*. As the *Helper* chugged into the Creux Harbour, he saw the *Allouette* and the *Kitty Hamon* anchored under Les Laches. So they were back. . . . He looked anxiously round on landing, but saw only two de Carterets who had come down to fetch stores for La Frégondée. He felt inclined to ask them about his cousins, but on consideration refrained. They stared after him and his companion, and their merriment told him that they foresaw his discomfiture.

Rose was no longer tired on this second walk together. She was delighted with the flowery heart of the island, richer and wilder than the heart of Jersey. She pulled handfuls of bluebells from the banks, laughing and singing to herself in the spring warmth of the afternoon. As they walked over the Coupée into Little Sark, Dan found himself wondering if even his cousins could be harsh to this beautiful singing thing with her hands full of flowers.

§ 2

He need not have worried. There was but one thought in the le Couteur mind, one reproach on the le Couteur tongue—for the loss of the *Baleine*. Dan might have brought the whole female population of St. Helier in his train without causing half the uproar they considered due to the disappearance of their smallest motor-boat. The *Baleine* had been only an ancient row-boat fitted with a second-hand engine, but the le Couteurs talked as if she had been a liner. No more swift, seaworthy, or luxurious craft had ever sailed the Russell or the Déroute. Unfortunately, they did not realise their blessing while they had it, and had failed to insure this paragon, considering the premiums they paid on the *Allouette* and the *Kitty Hamon* already over large.

"Vagabond!" shouted Uncle Eugene into the tangle of his beard.

"Vagabond!" shouted Uncle Philip.

"Oh, my gar! You make all the Carrés laugh at us," shouted his cousin Helier.

"You were drunk, vagabond!" shouted Uncle Philip.

In the midst of all this commotion, Rose Falla's presence passed almost unnoticed. Alice Hamon gave her some tea and gâche, and she had slunk away to bed in the children's room before Dan had had to do more than give a perfunctory explanation of her.

But the next day the storm had in a measure subsided, and in a clearer atmosphere the le Couteurs were able to fix their attention on this secondary point of folly.

Rose had been very bright and smiling at breakfast, which she had helped prepare, though she was unable to talk except in English—which Dan knew would be counted to her for unrighteousness. Afterwards, she had cleared the cups and plates away, and finally gone off with Alice Hamon to help her make the beds. Then Uncle Philip turned slowly to Daniel and asked:

"What you bring her here for?"

Young Sheather did his best to explain, glozing the fact that he would never have brought her at all if he had been sober. At the end of his harangue, Uncle Philip merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought you bring her for a wife."

"A wife! Good Lord! But I hardly know her."

"There is no need to know a wife. You get more than enough time to know her afterwards."

"But anyhow I'm not in a position to marry. Besides, I don't want to. That's not the way I'd——"

"Then what are you going to do with her?"

"Can't she stay here? She could help Alice—make herself useful in the house or on the farm."

"She cannot stay here."

"But why not? There's plenty of room for her."

"There is no room. We do not want her."

"But she can't go back to Jersey. She's absolutely alone,

I tell you—not got a relation or a friend worth anything. She'd have gone to the bad if I hadn't taken her. It would simply mean her ruin if we sent her back."

"Then why do you not marry her? I thought you had found a wife in Jersey."

Daniel lost his temper.

"That's not the way we do things where I come from. I'm damned if I'll marry a woman I picked up at a dance hall, whom I know nothing about."

"You say she is a Falle——"

"She says she is the daughter of Helier Falle who used to be at the Moinerie," broke in Uncle Eugene. "I remember him going to Jersey in the year they put the light on Platte Fougère. He married an Ozanne."

"But, even if—I mean I want to know more about my wife than who her parents were."

"You want a lot, as Englishmen always do. You are lucky to have the chance of marrying a Sark girl. Most girls would say they do not want to marry an Englishman."

"She may say so."

"Oh, my gar! She will not."

"But I couldn't keep her anyhow. I'm not in a position to marry."

"You earned sometimes thirty shillings a week last summer."

"I sent a pound a week to my mother."

"Then you must give up sending a pound a week to your mother, who has her own husband."

Daniel was exasperated.

"Damn it all! What makes you so anxious for me to get married? It won't do you any good."

"Yes it will," said Uncle Eugene. "If you marry, you will not be an Englishman any more; you will live here all your life and become one of us. *So we get your mother back again.*"

"The devil you do! Well, I tell you I'm certainly not going

to marry if it means chaining myself down to this damned island. Not that it means anything of the kind—I could take my wife over to England to-morrow if I wanted."

"In the *Baleine*," said Uncle Philip, and everybody laughed.

"Well, I don't choose to get married. I brought this girl over here because I thought you'd be humane enough to take her in and let her have a chance of a decent life. I never dreamed of marrying her, or dreamed that you'd want me to."

"We don't want you to," said a young Philip, "but we cannot have her here. We are already too many in the house."

"And how many less should we be if I married her?"

"We should be two less. You would go and live at La Colinette, or at La Ville."

"Or there is the empty house near Moie Fano," said a young Peter.

Daniel absolutely failed to understand his uncles' and cousins' train of reasoning. They imagined, no doubt, that if he married they would get rid of his uncongenial presence in their house and at the same time bind him irrevocably to their island. He guessed that they were pleased that he should have found a woman in Jersey instead of Guernsey, and especially pleased that she had Sark connections. There were still Falles at La Moinerie, who would probably acknowledge her as a kinswoman. At the same time he was lost in the cross-currents of minds so different from his own. He could not understand whether they really wanted him to marry and, in some way patent to their reasoning, bring back his mother's family to Sark, or whether they were merely terrifying him with marriage as an alternative to sending Rose Falla back to Jersey, hoping thus to get rid of her swiftly and creditably.

But though he failed to understand theirs, his own mind was made up. He could not marry this girl whom he scarcely knew, who had attracted him only by her helplessness. His

heart was still loyal to Belle, or rather to the shadow of Belle. Besides, anyhow, he did not want to marry; not unless he fell in love again—which was unthinkable.

§ 3

He rose moodily and went out. He was sick of his mother's family. They seemed equally immune from ordinary human decency and ordinary human motives. Bah! they were savages—a thousand years behind the inhabitants of the Ouse Valley. He'd half a mind not to stick 'em any longer, but clear out and go home. His father would be glad to have him back at the George, and he felt that now he could face Belle at the Crown . . . every day and all day just across the road, a shadow come to life. . . . No, perhaps he was still unready to face Belle; but there were other places he could go to besides Bullockdean. Anything would be better than living at the Pêche à Agneau.

He strolled across the back of Little Sark, down to the granite fierceness of its southwest coast, where the old mines stick their broken chimneys through the bushes above Rouge Terrier. For two or three hours he lounged among the buttercups, sucking an empty pipe, staring from the golden ground into the fiery blue of the sea, with its white slobber at the *baveuses* and the foot of Bretagne Uset. His eyes were full of blue and gold and white, and his ears of the groan of the sea, and his mouth of the acrid taste of stale tobacco, but his mind registered none of these things, for it was full of its own colours and tastes and sounds. He was angry with his cousins, angry with Rose Falla, angry with himself. In the last lay the sting of it all. He knew that everything was his own fault. Because he had forgotten his good English ways, he had landed himself and this poor little girl in a proper muddle. Not that she would have been much better off if he had left her where she was or if he'd never met her at all, but at least she wouldn't have been hurt so badly as she must be hurt now when he told her she

would have to go back to all he had made her flee from. He could see that she liked him, was a bit gone on him, in fact, also that she liked being at the Pêche à Agneau, with the children and the big cousins. It would be dreadful to have to tell her that she must leave it all. . . . What a fool he had been! He might have realised that the last thing in the world his cousins would understand was an act of disinterested kindness. . . . No, no—hang it all! He must be honest with himself, and confess that he would never have brought her over if his head had not been full of their horrible French drinks. He had acted foolishly rather than disinterestedly, and now like so many foolish men he would have to pay when he was sober the bill he had charged against himself when he was drunk. So help him, he would never drink again! But that good resolution wouldn't do much for him now, nor for poor little Rose, either.

For one dreadful moment it struck him that it was his plain duty to marry her in order to save her from a wicked life. But immediately he remembered that her situation in this respect was not of his making, but of her own. After all, he could not forget that she had deliberately consented to go with her friend to the dance and "find a boy." She had not had the moral strength to stand up to so monstrous a suggestion. That wasn't the sort of woman he should care for as a wife. Then he remembered Belle, with all her passions and follies. Many men would not have cared for Belle as a wife. But Belle was Belle. He loved her, so could forgive all. He did not love Rose Falla. He could not contemplate the idea of marrying without love. Therefore, it was not likely that he would ever marry, for he would never be in love again. He was not sure that he wanted to, either. It had hurt him too much—that love which Belle and Ernley had considered so quiet and comfortable and easy-going. After all, even the kitchen fire can burn you, for all it boils a pot. . . .

It suddenly struck him as a possible solution of his difficulty that the Falles at the Moinerie might consent to treat

Rose as a relation and take her in. The family consisted of a young husband and wife, a grandfather and a baby, some sort of cousins, he understood, of Rose's father. He did not think they had much to live on, but he found it hard to realise that here he could not expect the tender liberality of the English poor. He resolved to ask them anyhow, and tramped over to the Moinerie before going home. Another thing that had struck him was that the le Couteurs might actually put poor Rose on the Guernsey boat if he wasn't back in time to stop them.

The Moinerie proved as inhospitable as the Pêche à Agneau. Helier Falle was nothing but a name to the present occupiers, as the old man was the wife's father, and came from Alderney. After all, it was rather a lot to ask of them—to receive a wholly unknown young woman into their house at the request of a half-unknown young man. Only his desperation could have made the idea seem possible, he realised as he walked away.

The afternoon was now well advanced, and Dan knew that he must walk quickly if he was to be home in time to counter any plot of his cousins with regard to the Guernsey boat. Leaving the Moinerie lane he plunged cross-country to the mill, and soon found himself on the Coupée road, facing the dipping sun. He had come nearly as far as La Belle Hautgarde, when he noticed a dark figure swimming in the sun's rays. It swam towards him up the golden river of the road, and then suddenly was clinging to him with little panting sobs of relief and fear.

§ 4

"Oh, at last you come! at last you come!"

The flower of her face was wilted with crying, and the little hands that clung to him clutched and trembled, the fingers digging into his flesh like thorns.

"Oh, at last you come and save me! You won't let them send me away."

"Rose, my dear, don't cry so. Tell me what's happened."

Fearing either interruption or observation from La Belle Hautgarde, he led her into a field, down towards Les Petites Côtes. She poured out her tale, but he scarcely listened, for he knew what it must be. His cousins had told her she could not stay, that she must go back to Jersey. . . . Then he suddenly wondered if they had told her of the alternative he had refused. At the same moment he heard her say:

"They say you will not marry me. But you will marry me if it is to let me stay. I will not believe that you bring me over here and then let me go back again. Oh, I will make you a good wife. I will keep your house clean, and I will cook and sew. I will never ask you for anything. You cannot bring me here and then let me go back. For I love you! I love you!"

She threw her arms round him as they stood in the tall buttercups above Les Petites Côtes, and he felt her warmth and sweetness, like the sun on grass. Her face was hidden in his neck and her hair flowered golden round his lips. He knew that his arms were holding her and that he was hugging her close in protective pity. How in God's name was he to send this poor little soul back to the hideous life that awaited her in Jersey? In spite of the slackness or rather helplessness which had made her drift towards evil, she was as innocent as a baby. If she went to the bad, her guilt would be on his head. He had a hateful vision of her on the streets of St. Helier, down at the port with the sailors, at the Lock Hospital. . . . Oh, it was horrible? It was unthinkable, and the guilt would be his. There was no use kidding himself with the argument that she had made the first bad choice. The only fact that concerned him now was that he had the power to help her and would not use it. No! No! He could not. He could not marry a woman who was not Belle, he could not bind himself to the Norman island, as he inevitably must bind himself if he married under such conditions. And yet . . . the quivering of her heart against his made him almost sick with tenderness, and his flesh had

not so long lost its memory of Belle that he could remain unmoved by the softness of her face against his throat, the softness of her hair against his mouth.

"Oh, you won't let them send me away. I love you so! You are so kind to me! I will make you so happy—you cannot imagine."

No, he couldn't. Yet was his happiness anything that mattered very much now? If he sent her away, he would not be happy either—and she, she would be in the double hell of destitution and disappointment. Over his own happiness or unhappiness he had not much power either way—only Belle had that—or rather, even Belle had not that now. Only God had that. . . . Dan thought of God. He felt ashamed. Since he had come to Sark he had left undone so many things that he ought to have done and done so many things he ought not to have done—"*Nous n'avons pas fait les choses que nous aurions dû faire; et nous avons fait celles que nous n'aurions pas dû faire*"—that was how it went, really—in Helier de Cartaret's Prayer Book, and how it would always go from this day forward and for ever and ever if he married Rose. . . . But perhaps God wanted it to go that way for him. Perhaps God was giving him a chance to make up for his neglect of the good ways he had learned at Bullockdean, and at the same time was punishing him for it by depriving him of them forever. Standing there among the buttercups, with Rose in his arms, Dan felt an almost passionate desire to do the right thing as he had been taught. After all, to put himself first and let everyone else go to pot was just being like his cousins. "Duty" was a word he had learned in the army. He would be more of an Englishman in binding himself to Sark by marrying Rose than if he had refused to bind himself and let her suffer for his freedom. And they would not be bound forever. When he had put by a little money, they could go home. . . . After all, it was a poor prospect, never to marry. All men should marry and if they can't get the girl they want they must marry the girl they can get—that's all.

Meanwhile, Rose stood motionless in his embrace, waiting for her lord's word, while his thoughts wandered from Sark to Bullockdean, from earth to heaven, from heaven to the British army, from duty to comfort, from the abstract to the practical, and finally back to her straits. He looked down at her, but could see nothing beyond the flying anthers of her hair and the curve of her ear as she hid her face. Dragged by an uncontrollable impulse in which pity, though dominant, was not alone, he stooped and put his lips to her ear, just under the teasing hair.

With a little shudder she drew herself upright, and he saw her face, tear-stained and full of joy.

"Oh," she murmured, *"tu m'aimes."*

Then suddenly at those words his mother's tongue was in his mouth, and he was gabbling words of love in his mother's language—rough, salt-sounding words between which his kisses flowed like the tide between rocks.

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

AFTER that there remained only his humiliation when he had to tell his cousins he had changed his mind. But this was less painful than he would have thought. He felt a new, changed Daniel, facing life from a different angle. It was as if up till then he had faced life from Bullockdean in spite of his being in Sark, whereas now definitely he faced it from Sark, and the Bullockdean angle seemed distant and unreal.

He wrote to his mother and told her he was going to be married, though he did not tell her the circumstances of his meeting his bride. His mother, of course, would tell Belle and Ernley—he need not worry about that. Not that he felt inclined to worry. Even the shadow of Belle was gone now, for he had stepped outside the room of memory, and stood facing the islands and the sea without a glass between.

The days that followed were so full of preparations that he had little time for thought. The le Couteurs were anxious both to bind their cousin and get rid of the stranger as quickly as possible, so it was decided that the marriage should take place as soon as the necessary formalities would allow. There was some difficulty about finding a house, either at La Colinette or at La Ville Roussel. Dan inspected one or two cottages at the Dos d' Âne, the Jaspellerie and Moie Fano, and finally decided on the last, in spite of its lonely position on the cliff-top, looking down on the teeth of Brenière. It was larger than the other two, though it contained but three rooms, and seemed firmly built for the weather, with a roof of thatch and tiles instead of the usual corrugated iron. The rent was only two livres tournois

a week, under two shillings, and during the season he would probably earn from thirty shillings to two pounds. At least ten shillings a week would have to be put by for the unprofitable winter, but even then he might be able to earn something by helping his uncles on the farm—a service they would no longer expect for nothing. He felt rather disconsolate at the thought of being unable to help his mother, but, he reflected practically, a mother has no right to keep a man from his wife, and his mother had her own husband to support her and two other sons.

On the whole he was not unhappy; he now had roots again, though in strange earth. At first he had half thought of taking Rose over to England and trying to find a job there, but he shrank from facing the struggle of the employment market with her dependent on him, and he saw more clearly the consequences of bringing her to the George than he had seen them in the case of Belle. With Belle such dependence had been his only chance of speedy marriage, and his craving for her had blinded him to its inevitable miseries; but now that he had the alternative of an independent and self-supporting home, he would be a fool to give it up merely to escape from Sark. Since it was his only hope of married comfort, the le Couteurs must have their wish and get his mother back again.

Sometimes there were moments—generally in the middle of the night—when he wondered if he wasn't mad to be acting so—to be marrying this unknown girl without loving her, indeed while he loved another woman, and settling down in this unfriendly island, where in spite of his blood he was still a stranger. But he ended his qualms invariably with the question, "What does it matter, anyway?" Also, the old army spirit of fatalism was still upon him, the kismet of the trenches. He watched his approaching marriage as he used to watch the German shell-fire. If it was due to smash him it would, and if it wasn't it wouldn't. There was nothing he could do about it.

The day before the May day fixed for the wedding he

had three letters from England; one from his mother, one from Jess Harman, and one—at last—from Ernley Munk. His mother was a little inclined to reproach; she saw her son and her son's money alienated together. "But then you never really care for me like Christopher"—Christopher who, Dan reflected angrily, had never earned a shilling for her in his life. "No doubt my brothers Eugene and Philip are glad, for so they get us back." Evidently his mother's mind worked that way too. "Your father send his love and kind regards and best wishes for a bright and prosperous wedding."

Jess Harman had her expected string of news, a little shorter than usual to allow room for congratulations: "I'm sure I wish you happy, Daniel, as this leaves me at present. You deserve to be happy if anyone did, and I reckon you could make a girl happy easier than most. I always say most men don't know how to treat a girl, and when I have boy babies to take out I smack them harder than I smack the girls, for I say if maybe they don't deserve it now they will when they grow up, and then there will be no one to do it. Maudie talks of leaving the Crown, for she says young Mr. Munk is not so pleasant to work under as his father."

Daniel wondered if these two sentences had anything more than a haphazard connection. The thought made him tear open Ernley's letter without waiting to finish Jess's. It ran:

DEAR DANIEL,

I expect you're thinking all sorts of bad things about me for not having written for so long—or I might even say for not having written at all. But if was difficult to write at first, wasn't it? and afterwards it wasn't much easier, as there didn't seem to be any reason for starting suddenly. Now I've got a reason and I'm glad, for I want to hear more of you except just that you're going to get married, which isn't very original. I hope she's worthy of you. You're rather a damn fool about women, you know, and yet you deserve the best; so I hope you've got her. Now I suppose you will settle down in Sark for good. Well, you might do worse. I'm getting a bit sick myself of the land fit for heroes to live in. You'd think my job was to sell poison, to judge by the fuss they make and the restrictions they put on. But I'm better off than your

dad, who does sell poison, if I may say so. Still, I think he's a fool to try on all the games he does. I was sorry about his being so heavily fined last sessions, but I'd warned him, and being a racing neighbourhood, I suppose they're extra strict. If I were you I'd write and tell him to be careful, but I expect you have.

I've built an extra wing on to the Crown, in spite of all, so I've nothing to complain about really. However, I can't help thinking our best times were in the army, in spite of all the noise and blood. Life wasn't so deuced complicated, somehow; one knew what one wanted and wanted the sort of things one could get. I'm to be a proud father again next Autumn; the other kid's a regular Shackford; I hope this will be a Munk—to look at I mean, for I don't wish him so ill as to hope he'll inherit my devil. Do write soon and tell me about Miss Falla—rollicking sound to the name, somehow.

Ever yours,

ERNLEY.

Daniel paused. Ernley sounded bad. How well he knew his devil—that queer, bitter, angry, unhappy, rather common devil, who at times made Ernley so difficult to love. He wondered what Belle was feeling—not a single reference to her except indirectly. It might be caution, but it didn't sound like that. He wished Ernley hadn't written—worrying him like this just before his wedding day. And about his father too. He was worried about his father. "Heavily fined last sessions"—he'd never heard of that. They'd kept that from him. The old life was suddenly and painfully reasserting itself, just as he was going to cut it off for ever. Well, he mustn't think of it any more; he could do nothing about it. His responsibilities were no longer the old ones of Ernley and Belle and the George, but the new ones of marriage, home, and children. Yes, he supposed the day would come when he too would be a "proud father." Well, he wouldn't sneer about it like Ernley. He'd be glad, and he knew that already his allegiance belonged to the unborn.

§ 2

The wedding of Daniel Sheather and Rose Falla took place in the afternoon, in the midst of a high wind stroking the back of Sark, and rippling the buttercup-thickened hay.

The sun shone gaily in spite of the small white clouds that blew over the sky, and the general air was one of brightness and freshness and laughter, a rollicking sort of air, like the bride's name.

Bride and bridegroom drove together to church with their relations. Into the big mule-cart were packed, besides themselves, Uncle Eugene and Uncle Philip, one or two cousin Eugenes and cousin Philips, Helier, William, and Alice. The rest, including the children, came on foot, and as it was impossible for the mules to go at more than a foot pace most of the way, they trod round the wheels, talking and staring.

Rose wore a new blue dress, for which her measurements had been sent to Guernsey. Without her sophisticated work-girl's clothes she looked more of a child than ever and more of an islander. Stealing a secret glance at her now and then, Dan found her sweet and appealing in her laughter and her shyness. He was glad that she was fair and round-faced, and would never look like Alice Hamon who had already a witchy air about her, with her sharp nose and black locks. She was facing her future without a qualm, without a thought of the life and friends she had left in Jersey, accepting trustfully the life and friends she had found in Sark. She trusted Dan as absolutely as she had trusted him when at his word she had faced without question the perils of La Déroute. Well, he hoped her trust would be better justified this time, that her matrimonial craft would not go to the bottom like the *Baleine*. . . . He clenched his hands upon his knees as he vowed to himself that, come what might, this little thing should not suffer for the risks he had taken. He would strive for her happiness as he would have striven for Belle Shackford's. She should be given no less than he would have given Belle.

They walked into the church on either side of old Eugene le Couteur—Rose in her blue dress, Daniel in his blue jersey and wide-bottomed trousers. The church was packed, for weddings were a rare excitement, and at the end of the

aisle by the little bare altar, *le ministre* stood already waiting, holding open in his hand the Prayer Book of Helier de Cartaret, which was Dan's Prayer-Book now.

"Bien-aimés, nous sommes réunis ici sous le regard de Dieu. . . ."

The service had begun. Daniel and Rose stood alone together, hand in hand before the minister, for Uncle Eugene had withdrawn from publicity into a pew, from which he did not emerge till the question *"Qui est-ce qui donne cette femme en mariage à cet homme?"* when he shouted, *"C'est moi!"* as if across seven miles of sea. Then Daniel found himself saying after the Priest:

"Moi Daniel, je te prends Rose, pour ma femme et mon épouse, afin de t'avoir et de te garder, dès ce jour à l'avenir que tu sois meilleure ou pire, plus riche ou plus pauvre, en maladie et en santé, pour t'aimer et te chérir, jusqu'à ce que le mort nous sépare, selon la sainte institution de Dieu, et sur cela je t'engage ma foi."

Well, he meant it all, anyway. The strange language didn't make any difference. He knew that he'd promised just the same as he would have promised in English to Belle, and having promised no less he could give no less. Standing there with all the brown and blue eyes of the island fixed upon him, he knew that his mind was clear of its last doubt. This second part of his adventure with Rose would not end in shipwreck like the first. If he only did what he had promised . . . and he would. Now he was putting the ring on her finger, and was worshipping her with his body —now their hands were joined and *le ministre* was saying:

"Puisque Daniel et Rose ont consenti à s'unir en saint mariage, Je declare qu'ils sont entre eux mari et femme, au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint Esprit."

The harmonium gave a sigh, preliminary to shaking the marriage psalm out of its heart. Dan and Rose scrambled to their feet and followed the Minister into the chancel. They held hands almost convulsively during the rest of the service, which they scarcely felt concerned them, their own

personal part being now over. They were married. They were husband and wife, whom man could not put asunder. They who had not known each other a month ago would from henceforward know only each other. Daniel would belong to Rose and Rose would belong to Daniel till their eyes were dim and their hair was grey. They would build up a new life together in a new home, they would love beings as yet unborn, whose very names they did not know as yet. Passionate love was waiting in their hearts for those who were not yet alive. All the years that they had lived before, he with his parents at Bullockdean, and she with her father in Jersey, were only a sort of preparation to the main business of life. His love for Belle was only an episode. This was the centre and heart and reality of his life. This was marriage. Daniel felt almost afraid, when he saw what marriage meant, when he saw how it could brush aside all the fire and glory and anguish of love, and murmur its blessings over a few stones which forthwith became bread . . . water which became wine. . . . "And there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee" . . . a poor little affair of stones and water, which had somehow become bread and wine. That was his marriage with Rose.

They had turned from the altar and were writing their names in the vestry. Uncle Eugene made his mark as a witness after he had been satisfied that he was not committing himself in any way. The cousins signed, but no one offered to kiss Rose. Kissing at weddings was an English custom, Daniel supposed, like wedding-cake and bridesmaids and flowers and confetti and all the other things that would have been so important at Bullockdean. All that was English on this occasion was the music. There had been an Anglican chant for the psalm, and now Mendelssohn's Wedding March burst forth, as Dan and Rose walked down the aisle of the empty church and out into the churchyard, whither all the congregation had rushed in a body before them.

§ 3

There was a feast at the Pêche à Agneau—a feast of lobsters and gâche and armagnac, to which came Hamons and Carrés and Falles and de Cartarets from all parts of the island. Somehow Daniel and Rose seemed almost a minor part of the occasion. They sat silently side by side, while round them flowed the island French, which is to the French of Paris what cider is to wine. As yet it was not quite the language of either, since Rose had not spoken it for a year and Daniel had spoken it only for a year. If they did not listen, the words came only in scattered drops, without meaning. Dan could take for granted that his relations and friends were not discussing the marriage, but the prospects of next season, or the politics of Sark's most parochial pump.

He was free to look at Rose, and think how pretty she was with her golden hair and her blue dress, like buttercups by the sea. The line of her chin and neck was somehow helpless and innocent, like a child's, yet her little mouth and nose had a funny, decided air about them, as if, though she would rely on him in all big matters of life, in the small she would know her business, what to eat and drink and wear. In the blue pools of her eyes swam a queer flame, which he had not noticed till to-day. When her eyes met his, the flame brightened, and when she turned them away he could still see it shining, as one can see the sunshine in hidden water reflected on a rock.

They seldom spoke to each other. Once—"are you tired?" he whispered, and she answered, "Yes."

"I must take you home."

Under the table her hand crept out on his knee and lay over it. He looked round at all the Hamons and Carrés and Falles and de Cartarets and le Couteurs, eating and drinking and arguing, entirely forgetting the little married pair in whose honour the feast was given.

"Uncle Philip," said Dan.

"Yes," Uncle Philip roared down the table to Ernest Hamon, "the King of England will think it a fine thing when he comes to Guernsey, and the Forty Tenants are not there to receive him."

"Uncle Philip, would you mind—"

"He will see nothing but le Marchants and de Jerseys, and he will say, 'Where is the aristocracy?' "

"Would you mind if Rose and I went home now?"

"Of course, I do not mind. Go. We are the aristocracy of this island, I say, and the Parish will not allow us ten shillings to go over to Guernsey to see the King and Queen."

"Ha! Ha! It is a fine thing if the aristocracy of this island cannot go to see the King without ten shillings from the Parish."

"Who should pay but the Parish? I will not pay ten shillings to go to Guernsey, even to see the King. None of the Forty Tenants will go over unless the Parish pay. You are a fool, Ernest Hamon."

Dan and Rose crept out under cover of Ernest Hamon's retort, and the next minute stood in the sunshine of the May evening, which trailed golden banners over the sea. Their belongings had already been taken to Moie Fano, so all they had to do was to walk there themselves, through the buttercups and the long grass, with their shadows moving before them.

"Look at us," said Rose—"how big we are."

Daniel put his arm round her.

"There aren't two of us any more," said Rose.

He stopped her with a sudden check of his arm and drew her up against him, kissing her darling face on which he seemed to taste the sunshine.

"Oh, Rose, my little Rose—you are so sweet! And it's so wonderful! I never thought it would be like this."

She did not trouble about his words, but eagerly returned his kisses.

"Oh, my beautiful boy—my beautiful boy," she mur-

mured, holding his face to hers. "Daniel, your eyes are so dark and big, I see myself in them. Can you see yourself in mine?"

"No—not quite. Yes—now I can."

"That means you live in my heart."

"And you in mine."

They walked on, across the road, past La Belle Hautgarde, but on to the wildness of Rouge Terrier. Under their feet were the first little wild dwarf roses, and before them lay spread the dazzled blue of Baleine Bay, with all the rocks standing out of it, pink in the sunset, like castles. The tide was low, and the *demies* of l'Etac showed above the water and all the rocks round Sercul. The bay was streaked with currents, strange, smooth paths of rose and violet and grey winding amidst the chopped blue water. They walked further down the hill to the cliff edge, and the sun was lost, while a cool air ruffled up from the sea. They were above the terrible cliffs of Brenière, and though there was scarcely any tide, the eastern wall of Sark was dreadful in the dusk, like a dead face with its white gleam, the gleam of the blind white rock above Pot Bay. Towards the north the Point du Derrible was like some horned beast kneeling down to drink in the water. Daniel felt the strangeness and terror of Sark very near him, and the dreadfulness of those secrets below him in the bays, in that strange no-man's land between the tides. His arm drew Rose a little closer as he led her along the cliff-top, through the dusk, to where he could see the jut of Moie Fano.

"Look! Our home!"

She pointed through the twilight, and he could just see the thatched roof grey against the hillside and the faint gleam of the walls.

"You won't be afraid with me alone out here?"

"Oh no, I shan't be alone, with you."

They came to the little house, sheltering with its strip of garden in a fold of the hillside. The door was unlocked, and he led her into the dark kitchen.

"The lamp's on the table," said Rose; "I left out some matches. Can you find them?"

But instead of finding them he shut the door on the last gleam of light and drawing her close to him in the darkness, lifted her from her feet. The darkness was round them like a caress and a welcome as he held her there, high against his breast. Outside the dead light lay on the sea, and in the light lay all the empty islands and lonely rocks. The light seemed to hold the strange unfriendly spirit of the island, the enmity of sea and rocks, and the ghosts of their deeds; while the darkness held the spirit of the home built in the midst of all that strangeness, and the spirit of man loving and pitying in the midst of the pitiless sea.

§ 4

In the middle of the night Daniel woke out of a deep sleep into a half-dreaming state, in which he lay mysteriously cut off, very quiet of mind and body, and very happy, without quite knowing the causes of his happiness. The darkness lay all round him so heavily that it seemed a tangible thing; it almost seemed to be a body to him, now that he did not feel his own. It was also a friendly, personal thing, for he knew dimly that it was a part of home and that memory already dwelt in it.

He was waking, and two sounds mingled with the darkness, rousing him still more. They were strange soft sighing sounds, like each other, and yet astonishingly different. One he knew was a sound of terror and the other a sound of love, and yet in that half-dreaming moment he could not distinguish them. Then he woke a little more and knew that one was the sound of the sea, sighing round the rocks at the foot of Moie Fano, and that the other was he sound of Rose's breathing as she lay in the crook of his arm. The two sighs mingled and wove themselves together into a single sweetness and terror which woke him. He was awake now: he knew where he was and all that had happened, he

knew that his arm and shoulder were stiff under the weight of little Rose, whom he could hear and feel but could not see in the darkness. He lay motionless, holding her, his heart full of sweetness and terror, which were now both hers. The voice of the sea seemed to have died away; he heard only her breathing.

Then his own breath came short with a new, strange ecstasy. He knew that, all unexpected, all undeserving, he had stumbled upon happiness. This was what life gave you—was meant to give. He was happy; he would always be happy with Rose; he would always feel like this,—full of love and joy and pity, when she was near him. She was very near—part of himself, it seemed . . . part of his body, of his own flesh and blood. A picture drew itself in the darkness before his eyes—the picture of two country inns facing each other across a village street. It was a very small far-off picture, such as one sees through the wrong end of a telescope. That was his life at Bullockdean, his love for Belle, set far off and far behind at last. It faded, and the darkness was upon his eyes, kinder than any light. The sea, far below at the foot of the cliffs, drawled another long sigh. He turned his head on his shoulder, till his cheek touched Rose's hair; then he slept again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

THE months which followed were summer indeed. To the end of his life Daniel would always see summer as a blue sky vaulting a blue sea, in which pink and purple islands swam under the sun. It was a summer of drought, of the burning of hayfields, the powdering of the roads, of the kindling of a purple fire of foxgloves at the Orgeries and at Château des Quénévés. The wells dried up, including the shallow well at Moie Fano, and every evening and every morning Dan toiled with buckets on a wooden yoke to the Pêche à Agneau, where the water-supply was good and lasted through the summer. It was an irksome task, but he did it gladly as his only domestic duty. Rose proved herself rather unexpectedly a good housewife. After all, she had cooked and kept house for her father at St. André, which meant not only household experience, but experience of a fisherman's household. She knew how to cook every kind of fish and shell-fish, how to bake bread of a heavy sort, how to support the small, island dearths of salt or yeast, and she never expected meat except on Sundays.

Both she and Daniel worked hard enough. She had the three rooms of the little house to care for and keep clean, she had the meals to cook, all the washing to do, and also the husbandry of the tiny garden with its supply of herbs and vegetables. Dan bought her a few hens from La Belle Hautgarde, and taught her how to look after them, which she did very proudly, the eggs being a luxury which few Sark homes of that size could boast.

His own time was spent almost entirely in the boats. The season was a good one, and from the middle of May on-

wards there were visitors to be taken fishing and rowing and sailing, as well as the care of many lobster-pots. The le Couteurs had forgiven him for the loss of the *Baleine,* though their sense of humour had flourished embarrassingly on his misadventure long after their sense of outrage had died away. His marriage and establishment had paid off their grudge against his strangerhood, and they were glad of his help in the summer business of making money. They found him generally efficient, always willing, and his English speech and custom, though obnoxious to themselves, were useful when dealing with the visitors.

His duties did not allow him much time with Rose, but he had all the winter to look forward to, and meanwhile he had his Sundays free, for the laws of the island forbade boating and fishing on Sundays. Touched into humility and gratitude by a happiness which he felt to be as undeserved as it was unexpected, he had, on leaving the Pêche à Agneau, gone back to some of the "good ways" he had learned in the Ouse Valley. On early Sunday mornings he would be the island of Sark at the altar, as long months ago he used to be the village of Bullockdean. He knew that by so doing he took away some of the good impression he had made on the le Couteurs. But in spite of Helier de Cartaret's Prayer Book he could not quite rid his mind of the idea that English was the proper language for devotion. He taught Rose to say Our Father in English, and they said it together every night, kneeling beside the bed.

Daniel's happiness in Rose was still as fresh and rich as when he had first met it in the darkness at Moie Fano. Indeed, as familiarity and companionship deepened, if they could not widen, his knowledge of her, his love and joy and satisfaction grew. Her most noticeable quality was her yielding gentleness, which he had saved her from making the instrument of her misfortune, and now under the guiding of his hands was being made the instrument of happiness and goodness for them both. She adapted herself to her new life apparently without effort. She shed from her the

life of the town work-girl with its crowds and excitements as easily as she had shed her town clothes. She seemed to have no regrets or even memories. Dan was her whole guidance and concern, and just as she had followed him without a qualm into the dangers of an unknown sea, so without qualm she followed him into an unknown life, as devoid of doubts as she would be devoid of reproaches if he failed her.

He sometimes wondered how he had ever feared that her mind was tainted by her experiences in St. Helier. She had merely been under a bad influence, that was all, yielding herself to the guidance of a stronger mind as she would always do. No doubt his darling little Rose lacked what was called "moral courage," but that only doubled the sweetness of his protection, since it must be not only of her body but of her soul. She was his in a dependence which few women can have on a man, and that dependence called out of him all that was strongest in love and cherishing.

Nevertheless, as day by day he came to know her better, he discovered that at the bottom of her heart she carried a tiny life of her own—a little seed of personality, the essential Rose. She would make him confidences as to her likes and dislikes and ideas; they would talk together about the big strange things that inwardly perplexed them both, though outwardly they took them for granted. Perhaps they neither of them had much wisdom, nor enough curiosity, but this occasional glimpse of the "separateness" in her served to make the sense of "togetherness" more complete—the more he saw his little Rose standing apart from him in her own soul and life, the more she seemed a part of him, of his being. The more she was herself, the more completely she seemed his, rather than in her gentleness and yielding. So he loved her seed of separate life, and like the rest of her it flourished under his care.

§ 2

When winter came, it was very unlike the winter that had been last year. Or rather its essence was the same, but its effect and influence were altogether different. The storms that battered the cliffs were no longer a distress and a terror, but a mere noise outside, that made the quiet and warmth at home stand out more comfortably by contrast. The fogs, too, were no sad pall weighing upon the island, but a soft white blanket wrapping Daniel and Rose into a loving loneliness. It was just as on the evening after their marriage, when outside had been the dead, blind face of Sark, cold in the haunted twilight, in the light more dreadful than darkness, and inside had been warmth and tenderness and love and the kind spirit of man. During those nights of storm and fog, when the fire burned brightly in the kitchen, and the supper was laid under the lamp, Dan would see the cottage at Moie Fano as a lighthouse on a rock, as the Corbière or the Casquets or Platte Fougère, a house of light set in the midst of darkness.

There were days on which they did not even go as far as the Pêche à Agneau, but they never felt dull in each other's company, or alone when they were together. Daniel helped Rose with the work of the house, even now and then with the cooking, for he took an unmanly pleasure in messing about with pots and pans. He became cobbler and mended their shoes; he became tinker and mended their kettle; he became plumber and fixed a pipe to drain off the rain-water from the roof into a butt, so that they should be better watered next summer; he became carpenter and delighted Rose's heart with shelves and brackets.

Sometimes of an evening a Helier or a Philip or a Eugene le Couteur would call round for him on his way to the *Bel-Air*. But Daniel no longer cared for the *Bel-Air,* or for drinks English or Norman. He wanted to stop at home with his wife, to help her lay and clear the supper, and

afterwards to sit and watch her while she sewed—garments for her own little Helier who was to be born in the spring.

"We will certainly call him Helier," she said, "after my father."

"Helier Sheather doesn't sound right, somehow."

"Helier le Couteur sounds very well," said Rose.

And Daniel knew that he was not called Sheather any more. Indeed, he had never really been Sheather in Sark. Before he married he had just been "the English le Couteur," and now he was le Couteur un-Englished. . . . Well, it was what he had been prepared for, and when his child was born the le Couteurs would indeed have his mother back again.

He looked eagerly forward to that day in the spring which would make him a father. Rose was determined that she must have a son, but Daniel would have been equally glad of a daughter. He would have been free to give his daughter an English name, but a son must inevitably add to the mass of Heliers or Philips or Peters in the island. Not that there was any particular reason why he should want an English name. He and Rose no longer spoke English together. It had always been difficult for her, and she soon picked up the native French, which was not so different from the French of Jersey, and which by this time he spoke quite readily. After all, it had been his language as a child, and its sweet roughness seemed the right expression of his love and the concerns of his household.

All that he had of English was his prayers and his books. Daniel had brought Rose to share his taste for reading, and in those long evenings they read together—mild stuff which the Vicar lent them. Rose loved the mild stuff, and would weep over what she understood of *Cometh up as a Flower,* or *The Silence of Dean Maitland;* to both of them whatever they read was intensely real, and they took their fiction with a seriousness that would have amazed its authors.

They would read sitting at the table side by side, the book spread under the lamp, while first Daniel would read

in the slow plodding English of his custom, and then Rose would read, more quickly and eagerly, but getting herself into sorry tangles over some of the words, and occasionally having to apply to him for the sense. Afterwards, while they were undressing, they would talk over what they had read and pre-cast the next day's portion. If the story turned out badly Rose would cry, the luxurious tears of the happy, while Dan would comfort and even, on emergency, supply a new end to the tale, in which "they all lived happy ever afterwards" in defiance of the author.

His happiness was beginning to assume an added sweetness of sobriety. The slightly restless quality of the first months was gone, and in its place was a quality of warm stillness, which steeped his whole being. The disquiets of the outer world or of his old life could not reach him. At Christmas he had not been hurt by the neglect of his family, represented only by a card, nor by another of Ernley's cynical letters, hinting at more indiscretions at the George and disillusions at the Crown. He had all the natural selfishness of the happy man: even the thought of Belle could not stir in him any real anxiety. He had told Rose about Belle and of the earthquake of his love for her—he told Rose everything, dropping the secrets of his heart into the warm shallow pool of her confidence which scarcely eddied round them. She had no jealously of Belle, and not much interest in her. Daniel, for her, existed almost entirely in the present moment, and, unlike so many women, she scarcely thought of the years that had been before he met her, nor looked for their scars.

He did not see this attitude as a defect; indeed, coming so simply and naturally as it did, he came to judge it as the only natural attitude. After all, what did it matter, what he had done and suffered before he met her? That part of his life was over, a mere prelude to this. Let him put it out of his mind since he could never put it into hers.

He loved her utterly now, with body and soul. It seemed as if he had always known and loved her—this little stranger

whom he had not met a year ago. As she drew near her time, an unexpected weakness developed in her, and the doctor, anxiously summoned, said that she must rest. Still free from the boats, Daniel did all the work of the little house—sweeping, dusting, and cooking. In the evenings he made her go to bed early, and brought the lamp to her bedside, to read to her till she slept. When March came with the first mild days of spring, he carried her down the cliff-slope into a little sheltered hollow among the rocks of Mont Razeur, and she lay there beside him in the basking warmth, holding his hand among the sweetness of the spring grass, gazing idolatrously at his seaward-turned face, dark between her and the dazzle of the water. One day she waved an arm towards the dim whale-shape of Jersey.

"We come from there together, you and I."

"You are not sorry you came?"

"No, I never was sorry, except when I thought you would send me back."

"Perhaps I will send you back some day," he teased.

"Oh, no, you would never send me back. You love me too much."

"I love you! What an idea!"

"I think you love me very much—I think you would be very unhappy if I die."

"Die! Rose! Darling Rose—don't talk of dying."

"One must talk of it sometimes."

"But not to-day, when everything is warm and lovely because spring is here. You are not afraid of dying when the baby comes, are you, little Rose?" he cried anxiously.

"Oh, no, I only talk of it. But I like to think that when I die you will come with me, and we will go out together, as we did in the little boat, and I shall watch your face and know I cannot be afraid."

"When you die, it will not only be me whom you will want in the little boat. There will be others—our children."

"Yes, there will be Helier—and Helier's sister—and perhaps others. But I shall always love you best."

"I wish I felt so sure."

"You can be sure. I could never love a son or a daughter as I love you."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me that. If I should try to tell you, I should feel afraid."

"But why?"

She would not answer, and thinking that perhaps the conversation was growing too tense and disturbing, he began to talk of the coming season and of the things they would do in the boats.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

IT was on an evening towards the end of April that Rose's time came, and Daniel went out to La Vermandée to fetch the woman who had promised to be with her. That night he slept on the sofa in the kitchen and saw through the uncurtained window a big yellow moon bright above Balmée. The sea was like a golden floor, or a meadow of buttercups, with the dark shapes of the rocks standing out of it—*grunes* and *baveuses* and *demies,* uncovered at the half-tide. There was an utter calm, and the unusual stillness kept him awake and somehow made him afraid. It was months since he had known a quiet like this, for the stillness of the fogs had been pierced by the moan of the sirens—Blanchard, Point Robert, and Platte Fougère moaning to each other across the deeps. But tonight there was neither moan nor sigh, without or within. Sometimes through the closed door he heard the sound of voices, but for most of the time there was silence, a silence that oppressed him as the silence of the sea.

He went out early, for the calm would allow him mercifully to spend a day in the boats. Mrs. de Cartaret made him some breakfast, and before he left he had one look at Rose. He was surprised to find her sitting up in an armchair beside the bed, pale but smiling, and anxious to know if the calm weather would allow him to put down some early lobster-pots at the Masoline. He kissed her passionately and humbly, and she said:

"Do not worry—it is natural."

He walked quickly over to the Pêche à Agneau, and found his cousins ready to put out in the boats. Old Eugene and

Philip le Couteur were delighted when they heard what was toward at Moie Fano.

"At last we have our new Helier," said Uncle Eugene.

"Or our new Kitty le Couteur—she is better," said Uncle Philip.

"Better than the old one—ha! ha!"

"Ha! Ha! Oh, my gar—yes!"

The day passed outwardly tranquil as the night. The boats rode on the calm waters of Havre Gosselin, where even the dreaded pass between Brecquo and the Moie du Gouliot was little more than a spatter of dancing gold. Spring was come, and the gulls were seeking their nesting places. The Moie was covered with them—a flutter of white wings, an outcry of shrill voices, breaking the stillness of the noon. Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Lounging in the boat, waiting for the slow fish, and listening to the le Couteurs' laughter and talk among themselves, Daniel thought that the gulls' voices were like his cousins'—Norman voices, hoarse and rough like the names of the rocks. Ha! Ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha! That was the voice of Sark—of its people, of its gulls, of its rocks. Ha-ha-ha-ha!—laughter for love and laughter for death.

The day dragged on and at last a tinge of rose crept into the mirror of the sea, and a little wind ruffled up from Herm in the west. The le Couteurs brought their boat round to the Saut de Juan and beached her, and Daniel was given his share of the fish.

"You are glad to go home," said Cousin Eugene.

"You go to find little Helier," said Cousin Philip.

"Well, we all be godfathers," laughed Cousin Peter.

"Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Daniel walked slowly from the Saut de Juan. Every now and then he would hurry, then check himself. Perhaps he had better not get back too soon. Then he would tell himself that Rose was different from the women at home—she came of a sturdy breed. Probably the baby had been born hours ago. If it had not been for the last few weeks

he would have felt no anxiety. He remembered the words with which she had dismissed him that morning, "Do not worry—it is natural." Yes it was natural, and he was a fool to be making such a fuss. Yet, as he looked round him at the toothed and horned rocks and the deadly slaver of the sea over the buried *grunes,* he distrusted the tender mercies of nature, and felt thankful that his little Rose had not been left to them without the pity and help of man.

§ 2

The smoke of the chimney of Moie Fano rose in a straight column against the sky. There was something in that pillar of smoke which stood to Daniel as a sign. It was the sign of the inn of home, rising from homes in the Ouse Valley as it rose from homes in Sark, and as probably it rose from homes in France, in Germany, in Russia. In every place where there was home there was also that smoke ascending from the hearth, like a prayer towards the sky. . . . To-night it was the prayer of the cottage at Moie Fano going up to God for the mother and her child.

He was getting fanciful; that day spent amidst the laughter of his cousins and the laughter of the gulls had made him silly. He must pull himself together if he was to be any help and comfort to Rose. As he crossed the threshold, he heard voices coming from the inner room, and recognised a man's among them. The doctor must be there. . . .

He knocked at the door.

It opened, and the doctor looked out. He started at the sight of Daniel. Then he came through into the kitchen, shutting the door behind him.

"I'm glad you've come home, le Couteur."

"Is—is the child born?"

"Yes—a boy—and he will live," said the doctor gravely.

Dan was startled. He had never thought of the child not living.

"But how is Rose? Can I see her?"

"No—you can't see her just yet. I want to talk to you about her. Sit down."

Daniel felt his knees suddenly weak. He sat down as the doctor bade him, and stared into his face. Afterwards it seemed as if he had read in his face instead of heard from his lips that Rose was very ill and would almost certainly die.

"Can't—can't you do anything?"

"I am doing my best."

But in his face Daniel read that sometimes the pity and help of man are of little avail against what is natural.

"Now you'd better get yourself some supper," said the doctor kindly. "Mrs. de Cartaret can't come to you yet; but you must have something to eat, for you'll want all your strength—for her."

"When can I see her?"

"In an hour perhaps. Now make yourself some coffee and have a bit of something nourishing."

He went back into the silent inner room.

Almost automatically, Daniel put the fish he had brought home into a tub of water. Then he set the saucepan on the fire, and some bread and cheese on the table. He was hungry—hungrier than ever, since he had heard the doctor's news—and he did not know that hunger and sorrow are incompatible. He ate hungrily—strengthening himself for the night. The coffee was good. It cleared his head in a wonderful way, so that it lost the echo of the gulls' laughter, and was able to think. He did not want to think for himself—he would have been happier in his stupefaction—but he wanted to think for Rose. He did not want to sit beside her dazed and helpless when she would need his help more than she had ever needed it—putting out to sea alone in her little boat, which was to have held the two of them. . . .

He had not thought of lighting the lamp and scarcely noticed the darkness dropping round him, till at last the window square held the only light. His first realisation of

it was when a golden slant fell into the room from the opening door. The next minute he heard Dr. Pelley's voice call softly, "Le Couteur," and then from the bed behind the doctor came Rose's voice, faintly, yet very much as it had so often come from the inner room when he entered the kitchen at the end of the day:

"Es tu là?"

Without answering he went in and knelt down beside her.

She lay as if sunk into the bed, so relaxed that she scarcely seemed so much to lie on the mattress as in it. Her face was deadly white, but on her lips was a smile and on her arm was pillowed a little dark head.

"Notre Helier," she whispered, smiling up at him.

Mrs. de Cartaret stooped and lifted away the child.

"She wanted to be holding him when you first saw him—but she is not strong enough. I will take him now and put him in his cradle," and she laid Helier in the bottom drawer of the chest, which had been made into a cradle for him with shawls and a piece of blanket.

"Oh, Daniel," whispered Rose, "my feet are so cold."

She had made her little gesture of motherhood, but could maintain it no longer; she was too tired. She turned to him, as instinctively she used to turn when she was tired.

"My feet are so cold."

"Mrs. de Cartaret will heat you a brick for them."

But the midwife shook her head.

"She has a brick already—she does not feel it."

"It's because I'm dying," said Rose, in her weak, indifferent voice.

"My darling, you're not dying—you mustn't die,"

"Oh, yes I must. That's how it begins—at your feet."

Daniel hid his face beside hers in the pillow.

He heard the doctor tell the midwife that he was going home now for a bit. He would be back soon, and he did not think there would be any change before morning. Mrs. de Cartaret went into the kitchen and Rose and Daniel were alone together.

They did not speak. Rose was too exhausted and Daniel was too stricken. He had climbed on the bed beside her, and lay with his face close to hers, her hand held between both his. He felt submissive and numb. He meant to be able to help and strengthen her, but now he saw that there was no help he could give, except of the humblest, most homely kind, the help of touch and kiss. They lay motionless side by side, while Mrs. de Cartaret ate her supper in the kitchen. Now and then they opened their eyes and gazed into each other's, but for the most part they lay with their eyes shut, awake, but as if asleep.

The baby whimpered in his cradle-drawer. Daniel had forgotten all about him.

"Helier," whispered Rose.

"He is all right."

"Our Helier," she murmured; "remember . . . he is ours."

The midwife came in and attended to the baby. Then she came and attended to Rose, giving her something out of a spoon. She took no notice of Daniel; she let him lie just as he was.

The night wore on, and surprisingly he fell asleep. He had the sensation that she had fallen asleep too; and directly he slept they were in a boat together, pushing out, as they had pushed out a year ago, under the shadow of Gorey Pier with the moonlight gleaming through the piles. He heard the wind blowing very loud, as it had not blown then, but the next minute it was still, and they were riding on calm waters steeped in sunshine, under the pink rocks of Balmée. He could not see Rose, but he knew she was in the boat, and suddenly he heard her say, "I am not afraid." In his dream he had a wonderful sense of the sunshine striking off the pink rocks and dancing on the sea. He was not unhappy, but a little scared . . . anxious . . . he awoke.

The doctor was in the room, bending over him with the lamp in his hand, the lamp whose flame was an orange isle in the white flood of the dawn.

"Wake up," said the doctor gently, "it is all over now."
"Over. . . . She is dead?"
"She died in her sleep."
She had left him . . . so quietly.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

DANIEL'S marriage ended as it had begun—in a strange language. This time Helier de Cartaret's Prayer Book was open at La Sepulture des Morts, and to a jigging Anglican chant the congregation—much the same as that which had gathered for the wedding—sang *"Voilà, tu as fait la mesure de mes jours de quelques palmes, et la durée de ma vie est devant toi comme un rien. Certainement l'homme passe comme une ombre."*

"Comme une ombre . . . comme un rien"—that was the marriage now which had filled and changed his life—all the memory of those days: the summer days when he had toiled on the sea, the winter days when he had toiled on the land, the summer nights when the moonlight had made the bed a house of silver, the winter nights when the lamp had made the kitchen a house of gold—all now were as the shadows . . . which sweep out on the winds to sea and are lost . . . shadows moving under the clouds over Baleine Bay . . . whose footsteps are not known.

"Ecoute ma prière, Ô Seigneur, Car je suis étranger et voyageur devant toi; comme l'ont été tous mes pères."

As the le Couteurs belonged to the aristocracy of the island, the first part of the service was held in church. A thick rain was falling and it was not till the last prayers that the congregation came out and stood under the dripping ilex trees. No one wore mourning; black was too difficult to procure, and too short lived in the salt sea air. Daniel had a black band round the arm of his jersey—that was all.

"L'homme né de la femme est de cante durée. . . ." The dreadful rhythm of the burial hymn rose in incongruous

and courtly French, like a Tartar hermit dressed as a troubadour. The sods of Sark earth rattled on the coffin-lid—plain English that. Dan shuddered. For the first time he identified Rose with the coffin and its contents—Rose with her hair like flying anthers, her eyes like the pools in the sea gardens of Tintageu. . . . The shy, unwilling tears forced themselves out of his closed eyes. He had not wept before, and it was punishment to weep like this before all the island, in the sight of all his cousins, of all the Carrés, and Falles and Hamons and de Cartarets; but he could not help it. There was something in this burial service so close to earth that the anguish of earth was upon him. He saw himself as he saw Rose, as flesh, and all flesh as grass.

When the dues of earth had been paid, the le Couteurs walked back in straggling groups to the Pêche à Agneau. Daniel went with them, for he was to live there now. The cottage at Moie Fano was too lonely for a man with a young child, so he came back to the place where Sark had given him its first unfriendly greeting. As he walked over the brow of Little Sark, and looking down the slope, saw the still sea, with the currents wandering over it like dim mysterious paths, it seemed as if the sea rather than the land—the ilex-shaded churchyard where he had left her—held the presence of his little Rose. Though the sea had not taken her, as it had taken so many in the islands, he thought of her now as on the first night he had known her, crouching in the stern of a boat that was putting out into an unknown sea, embarking—this time solitary—on the strange paths of the sea, where their footsteps are not known. *"Comme une ombre . . . comme un rien. . . ."*

§ 2

With curious ease he adapted himself to the new life, almost as if his year of marriage had not been. He soon became used to the unaccustomed solitudes; indeed, in a strange way he came to value them—the solitude before

sleeping and after waking, and of idle daylight when he lounged on the sward above the cliffs. He never went to the southeast coast, to the cliffs above Gorey and Brenière. In tacit covenant with himself he refused to see the cold roof of the cottage at Moie Fano, or Balmée sleeping like a whale on the golden floor of the sea. Instead, he haunted the western coast, which he had hitherto neglected, except as conductor of the English. From the eaves of Pégâne Bay he looked across the purple Autelets towards Saignie and the tail of Sark; beyond, among strange rocks like men-o'-war, lay Herm and haunted Jethou . . . and beyond Jethou lay the violet shape of Guernsey . . . and beyond Guernsey. . . . He knew the country that lay in the blue and purple mists beyond Guernsey, and once more he found himself thinking of it as home.

His brief naturalisation was over. At the Pêche à Agneau he was the same stranger he had been before his marriage. Though he now spoke their language and followed their customs, he had all his old curious sense of difference from the le Couteur clan. He had never felt that difference between himself and Rose. He and Rose—so different in so many ways—had essentially been one. But now that he was back at the Pêche à Agneau he once more felt that half-amused, half-angry bewilderment at the native mind; he knew that however freely he spoke their tongue, however naturally he followed their ways, his mind would never work as their minds.

He had at least two notable outbreaks of Englishry. One was when he insisted that his son should be baptised Thomas Helier instead of by the name of his wife's father alone.

"He shall be called after my father too."

"There is not one of us has ever been called Thomas," said Uncle Philip.

"Well, there's nothing like making a start. You need a few fresh names."

"The Hamons will laugh at us," said Cousin Philip.

"They'll do that whatever we call him."

"It is an English name."

"And what are Ernest and Peter and Philip, I'd like to know?"

"They are Sark names. Thomas is English."

"Well, damn it all, Thomas has an English father."

He marched off contemptuously. Really, for sheer ignorance his mother's family were hard to beat. However, they could not stop him calling his baby anything he liked. He had half a mind not to call him Helier. Then he remembered Rose, and the way she had said "*notre Helier.*". . . . There was no help for it; Helier it must be, though it was Thomas too.

His next lapse was more serious. He found that on the tombstone that was to be put up over Rose's grave, her name was to stand as "*la chère épouse de Daniel le Couteur.*" For two and a half years he had been le Couteur now, but somehow he could not bear the thought of his Normanhood carved in stone.

"It shall be Daniel Sheather," he said.

"Then we do not pay for it," said Uncle Philip, which settled the matter, since Daniel could not afford to pay for it himself.

Sore and angry at his relations' benighted attitude, jealous of his own rights and honour, he put two pieces of wood together in the shape of a rough cross, and carved on them his loving memory of Rose Sheather, wife of Daniel Sheather formerly of the parish of Bullockdean, Sussex. It was his gesture of defiance, and in a moonless midnight he set it up at the head of Rose's little mound under the ilex trees.

The result was the ferment of the island. It was an insult to have Rose remembered under her English name, an insult barbed by the fact that it was her true one. The whole inscription was in English, too, which was a challenge, and the cross itself was considered Popish.

That night it disappeared, and Daniel could obtain no redress, since he had set it up without authority.

"If you are wise you will let it alone," said the Vicar. "Our people have strong prejudices here."

So he damped down his wrath and fiery sense of outrage, but he spent more and more of his free time above the cliffs of the western coast, looking out towards Guernsey and the country beyond Guernsey. . . .

Sometimes he thought he would just pack up and go home. Why should he slave to put money into his cousins' pockets when they didn't know how to treat him decently? He was deterred partly by the thought of Thomas Helier, who was well looked after by Alice Hamon, and partly by his own pride. He didn't want these Sarkies to think they could drive him out. He felt now that most of the le Couteurs would be glad if he went; they had his child, and in him they had got his mother back again. Daniel himself they did not care for. He was useful to them in the boats, but that was not everything, and they could probably do very well without him, as they had done before. His assistance with the visitors could not make up for his alien company in the house, from which they had hoped his marriage had removed him forever. Once or twice he was made the subject of a practical joke with fish—the sure sign of local unpopularity. Some one put a plaice in his cap when he took it off in church one Sunday, and on another occasion, creeping into bed tired out after a day in the boats, he found a cold mess of dabs awaiting his naked feet.

"Well, if I go," he said to himself truculently, "I take the kid with me."

CHAPTER TEN

§ 1

THE crisis came sooner than he had expected, forced by that outer world which had left him untroubled for so long. He had written to his family to tell them of Rose's death and the baby's birth, but had heard nothing from them, a fact surprising even from their indifference. Then at the beginning of September he received a letter from his brother Len. This was a fresh surprise, as Len had written only once since he had left home; but when he read the letter he realised that it contained matter too deep for his mother's scholarship.

Indeed, it recorded nothing less than the wreck of the George. Tom Sheather had been finally deprived of his license for allowing betting on his premises. It appeared that he had already been fined twice—once besides the occasion recorded by Ernley—and now his offence was too great to be passed over. His license had been withdrawn, whereupon his brewers had swooped down on him for long-owed arrears, and all the furniture; the pony and fowls would have to be sold to pay them. The family smash was absolute. Daniel was shocked and upset, but not deeply surprised. He had known the ways of the George too long, and had guessed how much worse they must have grown now that he was no longer there to control them in a small way. His mother's voice was shrill, but it could not persuade her husband out of his courses, and Christopher was thoughtless and indifferent. No, now that he came to think it over, he was not surprised.

There was only one unexpected element in the situation, and that was his father's behaviour. Len could hardly write coherently when he told Daniel that the captain of

the sinking ship had abandoned her. Tom Sheather had disappeared, leaving a message behind him to say that he had signed on a coaster going to Wales. He expressed no regret; indeed, so Len recorded in horror, he seemed actually pleased at the prospect. The innkeeper had shaken his shoulders and gone back to his first love. At twenty-two, Tom Sheather had left the land for adventure and freedom on the sea, and now at fifty-two he left it again, with evidently the same youthful expectation. Daniel had a brief moment of sympathy, though he was indignant at his father's callous desertion of his wife in the extremity to which his folly had brought her. He remembered certain talks and confidences—his parent's reckless wishes, his own persuasions. He had never really taken the older man's sea-fever seriously, but evidently through all those years it had been gathering temperature. Nevertheless, he was shocked and ashamed, and angrily put aside any extenuating reflections on the probable sharpness of his mother's tongue during the last days at the George.

"I'm taking Mother and Chris to live with me," wrote Len at the end of his long letter. "Chris will help me on the farm, where there is plenty of work for him. The farm has been doing better since last fall, but I don't know what will happen this harvest with the guaranteed prices off. It's just like the government to get us on a bit and then leave us stranded. Now things are altered with you perhaps you might manage to send mother something from time to time like you did before you married. I am very sorry to hear of your trouble, but we have nothing but trouble seemingly in our family. There are debts to settle up even after we have paid Hobday & Hitch. I won't take a penny from Ernley Munk, though he offered me a loan, as well he might, seeing what he has made out of the Crown. He has been a swine, saying it was what he had expected all along, and speaking against us for not stopping Father. I had a regular shine with him on Tuesday, and told him pretty well what I thought of him."

Dan frowned. That was a pity. But Len had always been like that—too proud to take a favour from anyone, except the government. He had been furious with Dan because he wore Ernley's old clothes. . . . Now, as usual, they would all have to pay for his pride, and Dan had never been able to see that pride was worth even half what it usually cost. . . .

Well, this settled it—he'd better go home. He might be able to do something to help them—get some sort of a job somewhere. He couldn't do anything for them as he was now. All that he had earned that season, which had not been so good as last year, had gone towards the support of himself and his child. If he went back to England, he might be able to get work on the land, or at the docks at Newhaven. Besides, he couldn't bear the thought of his mother penniless and abandoned. Of course, she had Len, and the cherished Christopher, but he thought of her as abandoned all the same.

Yes, he would go home; he was fed up with this ghastly island, which still treated him as a stranger though he had lived in it more than two years, and had married in it and begotten a child. It would be good to find himself a son of the house once more, even though that house was scattered and disgraced. He had nothing really to hold him to Sark, now that Rose was gone and that even her resting place might not be marked. . . . He would serve out the le Couteurs by taking himself and his son back to England. It was curious how he suddenly found himself desiring England, with its long roads and friendly people. . . . He'd manage somehow for himself and his boy, and he would be back once more in his own country, among his own folk. He would turn his back on the sea and islands, and they in their turn should become shadows on glass.

§ 2

The le Couteur attitude was mixed. On one hand they were glad to be rid of the stranger, on the other they were vexed that Kitty le Couteur should get her own back again. However, they were pleased that after thirty years of marriage her husband should have shown himself so unworthy of a le Couteur lady.

"Ah, that your poor mother should have married such a vagabond," said Uncle Eugene. "My brother Philip and I tell her he is *vagabond,* but she would not believe us. Perhaps she believe us now."

"You go back to England and sell beer," said Uncle Philip. "Englishmen like beer."

The pendulum swung when they found he meant to take his son away with him.

"He must not go." cried Uncle Eugene. "He is a le Couteur; he was born in this island."

"If it comes to that," said Daniel, "so was I."

"But your mother take you away and you never belong to us any more."

"And a good job too. I don't want my boy to stay here and grow up a savage."

"Ho! Savages, are we? Oh, my gar! We are savages! Mister Englishman is a gentleman—he is a visitor. That is it."

"I've a right to do what I like with my own child."

This was obvious even to Uncle Philip and Uncle Eugene. As, twenty years ago they had let Thomas Sheather depart with his wife and children, so now they must let his son depart with his child, reluctantly, yet knowing that none but themselves had driven out the stranger. However, when he was gone they would put up a splendid tombstone over his wife's grave with the text old Eugene had chosen out of his Bible, two months ago, before there was all the fuss: "*Nous n'avons rien apporté au monde, et il est évident que nous n'en pouvons rien emporter*"—a statement which ap-

plied with equal truth (if Thomas Helier were excepted) to her husband's sojourn in Sark.

Before he went, Daniel paid a visit to the narrow green mound under which Rose lay nameless. He was not inclined to be sentimental over Rose; nevertheless, he brought her his last offering in the shape of a wreath of the golden daisies that grow in the corn. He knew well that when he left, the new tombstone would go up, lozenge-shaped and white and French—Protestant against both Rome and England. He knew too that he would be Daniel le Couteur forever here in stone. But after all, he did not much care. Now he was free of them they could do what they liked with his name. He was taking away all that Sark had given him—the only thing it had ever given him—his marriage. He was taking away his marriage, for all that Rose lay here under a French headstone, engraved with a name that was not his, and that he would never lie besides her within sound of the sea. His marriage had been the one treasure of those three summers—indeed, the one treasure of his life. Amidst all the strangeness and hostility and abasement of his exile, the island had given him this one great gift which it could take away. Rose's body might remain here under the ilex trees, but he took his marriage with him in the child.

§ 3

William, Peter, and one of the young Philips went with him when he walked down to the harbour, with his child on his arm. Once more he wore his English clothes, which were now a little tight, with Ernley's British Warm to keep out the winds of the Russell.

"Now you not go out in the boat alone," laughed Philip.

"Or you run aground on the Paternosters," chuckled William.

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared Peter. "Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The farewells of his cousins mingled with voices of the gulls on Les Lâches.

The sea was calm and hazy. The summer's heat had baked to a rich gold the green tops of the Burons, where at last the flowers had dried. The little paddle-steamer swung into the Goulet race, making her way home by the east coast.

Daniel sat under the bulwark on the second-class deck, holding Thomas Helier firmly wedged between his chest and his arm, and already a little disconcerted by his change from a nominal to a practicing father. He resolved to take advantage of any feminine good will that might be shown him on board either this or the Southampton boat. At present the baby slept like a chrysalis in his white shawl, and after a time Daniel lost his preoccupation with him, as the steamer slipped over the deep waters by Les Abimes, and he looked for the last time on the Grande Moie and the Petite Moie, on Dodon and Noire Pierre, standing out of the sea like broken temples on a green plain. Then the steamer drew her wake past the Eperquerie—Sark's huge tail, lying out towards Herm, and holding a deadly sting under the water. The race began, the little waves fluttering round the *grunes* at Bec du Nez. . . . They were out beyond it now, looking back on all the huge, cragged bulk of that lovely, unfriendly island, which lay now as when he had first seen it, like a horned beast asleep upon the sea.

PART III

THE SEA

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

SUSSEX was as golden-brown as Sark, and from the downs came the same scent of hot thyme as came from the cliffs above Saignie. Otherwise there was nothing in the Ouse Valley to remind Daniel of the Norman isle. The twilight was full of mist, lying between the faintly curved ridges of the downs. There was no glamour save in the sky, where the west was the colour of a grape and the east was the colour of pale green leaves.

Daniel had economically taken the 'bus which ran several times a day between Lewes and Newhaven, leaving his luggage to follow by carrier the next morning. He felt tired after his journey and a little sick, for under the oily blue calms of the surface heavy swells had moved and shuddered over the sea's bed, and his change from boat to train at Southampton had only added to his discomfort, by depriving him of the fresh air. Now it was queer to smell the dust instead of the sea—the fine, white dust of the Newhaven road—and he had that curious, cradled feeling which he had so often known among the downs, watching their soft ridges lying above him against the sky.

He also had the same feeling as when he had come home after the war—the feeling of never having been away. The past two-and-a-half years lay behind him like a dream, and the present hour seemed to close up with those tragic hours at the George, when he had just lost Belle, as the hour of waking closes with the hour of falling asleep. Indeed, he was conscious of his loss of Belle as he had never been conscious during the last two years, and as he was not conscious of his loss of the girl who had really belonged to him—of

Rose *"la chère épouse de Daniel le Couteur . . . nous n'avons rien apporté dans ce monde, et il est evident que nous n'en pouvons rien emporter."* . . . It seemed as if even his memory of her had stayed behind in Sark, and slept within sound of the sea, under the white stone. No—it was not quite like that. There was something of her which he had brought away—one survival of that sea-blue interlude which was still with him now that he had returned to the main grey road of life. He looked down at Thomas Helier Sheather, asleep in his arms.

The baby was considerably less tired than his father. He had travelled comfortably, wrapped in his big white shawl, and he had not fared too ill by masculine attendance. Daniel had not miscalculated. A big tight-bodiced woman had taken charge of him on the *Lorena,* had given him his bottle after it had been warmed by the second-class stewardess, and attended to even more baffling wants, finally handing him over to a sister-woman, travelling in the coast-train, so that Daniel had not had actually the sole charge of him till Brighton. This had given him the happy illusion that babies are easily managed, and he looked down affectionately at Thomas Helier, cradled in his arms, and thought how good it would be to watch the little chap growing up, to see him beginning to look like his mother, perhaps . . . *notre Helier*. . . . He squeezed him in a passion of good will. . . .

They were set down at the sign-post where the Telescombe lane starts on its brief roaming. At first Daniel had a moment of qualm, when he thought that Len had failed to meet him and that he would have to trudge with Thomas Helier three miles across the down. But the next minute he saw his brother's trap coming round a bend—old bay Meg between the shafts, so different from the sad-eyed mules that had been his beasts of draught and burden for two years.

"Hullo!" said Dan.

"Hullo!" said Len.

"Whew!" he added, at the nearer sight of Thomas Helier.

"I squeezed him by mistake, and he's been sick," said Dan. "I wish you'd brought Emmie along."

"Never mind. Jump up, and we'll be at Brakey Bottom in half an hour. How old is he?"

"Six months. He was born the eleventh of April, and his mother died the same night."

Len nodded sadly.

"We've all seen a bit of trouble since we were together last."

"How's mum?"

"Oh, she's well enough. Pretty sick with Dad, as all of us are. She'll be pleased to have the child."

Daniel wondered.

"I can't help thinking," continued Len, "that none of this would have happened if you hadn't gone away. You kept things just within bounds while you was at home, but directly you'd gone, nothing would stop Dad ruining the business; and I can't see that you've done much for yourself by going. Haven't made a fortune out there, have you?"

"No, but I couldn't very well have stayed at home with my last young lady living only just across the road as another man's wife."

"We never know what we can do till we try," said Len oracularly.

§ 2

At Brakey Bottom his welcome was very much what he had expected. His mother kissed him and reproached him for having gone away; Christopher, whose good looks had become more striking in the last two years, gave him some languid attention; Emmie swooped in cordial competence upon Thomas Helier; and the children were friendly and noisy, even after it was discovered that Uncle Daniel had not brought any sweets.

"You don't seem to have brought anything at all except yourself and the kid," said Len. "Where's your luggage?"

"Following on to-morrow from Lewes."

"How are you off for money?"

"I've got a shilling."

"And how d'you propose to live on that?"

"I don't propose to live on it, nor on you, neither, so don't worry. To-morrow I'm going out to look for work."

"And it's precious hard to find."

"I know that, but I'll find it somehow. I'll take anything that's going."

"Well, I hope you'll consider us, and not disgrace yourself too thoroughly. I'm just beginning to pull the farm up in spite of everything, and I'd as soon my brother wasn't a railway porter or a dustman."

"I'd be thankful if I could get as good a job as either; it's more like to be cleaning sewers in Newhaven, or driving around a laundry cart."

"Well, I don't see anything to laugh about; what's happened to you? You've come back in a fine good humour; our affairs don't seem to bother you much."

"He's fallen in love again, perhaps," shrilled Kitty. "He's fallen in love with some one he met on the boat."

"No fear, Mum. I haven't been widowed six months."

"Then maybe it's your marriage that has changed you. You look different—more set up."

"You're lucky to have been out of all our troubles," said Leonard. "We've had some fine times here without you, and not a word from Father since he sailed."

"Oh, your father," groaned Kitty; "he take me away from my dear country and my dear family and then he leave me. Did your uncles send me any message, Daniel?"

Daniel gave what ought to have been the messages of Uncle Philip and Uncle Eugene but were not.

His mother sat by him while he had his supper—the others had finished theirs—and he told her about the Pêche à Agneau and his cousins and a little about Moie Fano and Rose. But she did not really listen much; her mind was full of her own trouble. She spoke of Tom Sheather as if

he had deserted her six months after their marriage, instead of thirty years.

"Oh, you men are cruel and faithless to us poor women, who work for you."

"No, Mum, we ain't," said Christopher, who was sitting at the table beside his mother. He rubbed his head against her shoulder, but she pushed him away.

"You do not love me; you are courting."

"What, Chris courting? Who is she?"

"She's Mary Wright at Exceat, and soon I shan't have even him left——" and her tears flowed.

"You will—you will," cried young Christopher. "Maybe I shan't marry her, and if I do, she'll have to say you'll live along of us."

"That always leads to trouble; the wife is always jealous of her husband's mother."

"Well, I don't know as I shall marry her. I haven't asked her yet, and seeing the way most marriages turn out, maybe I never will. Why, your girl, Dan, that you used to be so struck on, Belle Shackford that was, reckon she leads poor Ernley Munk a proper life, reckon he wouldn't be so sorry to have his single days again."

"What! ain't they happy?" asked Daniel, uneasy.

Kitty shrugged.

"As happy as most, maybe, but there's few men wouldn't like to see their single days again soon after marriage. They all go off and leave us sooner or later."

"But there's been no trouble—no quarrel—has there?"

"Not that I know of, but most like a lot that I don't."

Daniel could not be sure whether his mother was speaking from the bitterness of her own grievance, or whether she really had grounds for her suspicions. He decided to let the matter drop for the moment, but Chris pursued it rather mercilessly.

"I remember how gone you used to be on her, Dan. Three years ago you'd have wanted to punch my head if I'd told you that you'd soon be marrying another woman."

"Yes, thank God it all come to nothing!" cried Kitty, "and it is somebody else's son who marries a woman who is not a lady."

"What are you talking about, Mother?"

"Well, no one can say Belle Shackford was ever a lady. I know how a lady should behave; and other people know. That is why they did not let their rooms for this September at the Crown. She's a big scrambling thing, and she let the visitors see her with her hair down. . . . I myself see her with her hair hanging on her cheeks like straw, and her dress all undone at the back, so as you could see right through to her stays."

Daniel blinked; somehow his mother's broken words had called up an almost agonizing picture of Belle.

"Thank God you did not marry her," continued Kitty. "And thank God you did not marry a Carré or a Hamon. I have nothing against the Falles, and I should have been pleased to meet your poor wife if she had not been taken. But she has been taken, and I hope that some day you will marry again, for the sake of the child. Christopher shall take you to see his Mary Wright."

Daniel could not help laughing.

"Christopher, may I marry your Mary Wright?"

"You know I did not mean that," sulked Kitty.

"Come, Ma——" broke in Em Sheather, who had begun to clear the table, "I reckon Daniel's tired after his journey and wants to go to bed. I've had to put you in with the children, Danny—I know you don't mind, and I haven't got room for you anywhere else."

§ 3

The next morning Daniel went over to Bullockdean. He wanted to see Mr. Marchbanks and to see Ernley, and perhaps Belle. He would go to the Rectory first, but before he went to it he must pass between the two inns that stared

at each other across the village street. There they were—the George and the Crown; the creak of their signs in the wind seemed a familiar music, but he knew that the hearts of both had changed.

The Crown had changed outwardly too. It had grown a new wing, of red brick like the rest of the house, with clematis and Virginia Creeper already beginning to hide its crude contrast with the mellow time-worn bricks of the old dwelling. The George had not changed; it looked cracked and mean as ever, and peering through the taproom window, Dan saw the bar as it always had been, except for a strange young man in his shirt-sleeves, serving Messrs. Hobday & Hitch's beer to a couple of silent farm-hands.

Young Sheather could not resist the temptation to walk in and spend fourpence on a glass of the old bad ale. The man behind the bar was inclined to be friendly. He was the new landlord, he told Daniel: the former landlord had got into a mess with the police and had gone away to sea. He himself came from Rottingdean where he had been a gentleman's servant. The old man had died and left him a bit of money, and he'd been tempted to take a little place like this, and his wife's father had helped him. So here he was and he hoped he'd do well, though the place was a poor sort of place. He was evidently glad to have some one to talk to, having no doubt suffered from the local prejudice against "furriners," and Dan, moved to sympathy by his own recent experiences, had another glass, which reduced his capital to fourpence.

He then went up the village to the Rectory. Here were more changes, though perhaps they were less changes than intensifications. The house seemed more deeply sunk than usual into its orchard and garden, due, Daniel censoriously felt, to his successor's defective pruning. Its roof and its lawn had a shaggy, unkempt look, and the Rector kept a pig, judging by the smell that floated round from the back-yard. Daniel rang the bell disapprovingly.

After a time the door was opened by Mr. Marchbanks himself.

"What! Daniel!" he cried. "I didn't know you were back yet. Come in."

"I came back last night."

"But you haven't written to me for a year."

"No more I have," said Daniel sheepishly.

"Well, come in and have some dinner. I'm just getting it ready. Jess Harman has gone into Lewes for the day."

The kitchen was pleasant with the smell of frying bacon. Daniel took the pan, while the Rector laid the table; he also made some tea, and with that, and bread and cheese, they had a fine dinner, which Brakey Bottom would have despised.

"I wrote to you four or five days ago," said the Parson. "I expect you'd left before my letter arrived."

"Reckon I had."

Mr. Marchbanks was very shy, so he did not question Daniel as to the reason for his long silence. Indeed, he had been long enough in Bullockdean to guess that the reason might be only one of penmanship, the difficulty of getting thoughts or even words to flow in channels of ink. Daniel, on his side, felt a little ashamed of himself. He might at least have sent Mr. Marchbanks a card at Christmas—there had been cards for sale at de Cartaret's shop. These feelings made them both a little awkward with each other during the meal, but when it was over and they had taken out their pipes, they both grew more talkative. Daniel told his friend about Sark and the le Couteurs and Rose and the cottage at Moie Fano, and why he had come back with Thomas Helier, and how he must now set about and look for work. The Rector, in his turn, told him about the struggles he had had in church and Parsonage since Daniel went away. Tommy Pilbeam, his immediate successor, had lapsed from house and altar after a few months, and since then there had been a difficult variety of doubtful youths, till at last, in self-de-

ence, Mr. Marchbanks had become his own gardener and acristan.

"That's why the place looks so awful," he said ruefully. I can cope with the church, but the garden is beyond me. ess Harman's a splendid girl, but she's got more than enough o do indoors, and I'd arranged to sell the pig when I heard ou were expected home."

"I dunno as I've got much home now. At least, it's only Brakey Bottom, and I don't see as I can look properly after he pig and you if I live over there."

"No, that does make it rather difficult. I wish we could hink of something. It would be simple enough if I wasn't o stoney, but I can't afford to pay you more than ten bob . week; indeed, I don't see how I can even manage that now hat I'm paying twelve to Jess Harman. There she is, by he way," as a flowered hat went past the window. "I wonder vhat's brought her back so early."

As he finished speaking, the door opened, and Jess walked n, elegantly dressed in a saxe-blue coat and skirt and a pic- ure hat trimmed with a wreath of silk roses to which, either rom neglect or pride, the price-ticket still adhered, to show he destination of three and elevenpence of the Rector's welve shillings.

"I heard down at Auntie's that you'd come home, Daniel," he said as she shook hands, "so I thought I'd run back and ave a look at you."

Evidently she saw no necessity to maintain the relations f employer and employed out of working hours; she sat lown beside Daniel and fired a round of Bullockdean news.

"Reckon we're all glad to see you home," she finished, and uncommon glad to see you here. The place has been ll mussed up by those louts of boys, and we're looking to ou to put us straight again."

"But I don't see how he's to do it," said Mr. Marchbanks; he's living over at Brakey Bottom."

"Why can't he live here? You've eleven empty rooms, as

I scrub the floors of only. You could let him have one of those, or the lot if he likes."

"But how about furniture?"

"Reckon we could manage that. It isn't as if he'd need much; he's not used to anything special. There's a chair in here we don't use, and a box ud do for a washstand. And a few hooks we'd want . . . and maybe I could get hold of a bed somewhere."

"But I've got a baby with me, you know," said Dan deprecatingly.

"So you have! That'll be just sweet. I could do with a kid to mind. Look here"—she addressed her employer—"if you let him have a room, furnished, and his meals, and I look after the kid, then he can work the outside for us, and you needn't pay him nothing. I don't say it's grand, but it'll do while he looks around for something better. What about it, Daniel?"

"Reckon it ud suit me very well. But I dunno how Mr. Marchbanks feels about it."

"Oh, I should be delighted. I wish I could offer you a proper job, but this ud be better than nothing."

They discussed details, and at last everything was settled, since all three were eager that the plan should materialise. Daniel thought it a first-class plan, since it would spare him dependence on Len's anxious charity during the search for work, which he felt would probably be a long one; and when he got work, it meant that he would be able to afford quite a good sum every week for his mother, and wipe off the stigma he wore in her eyes. He was overcome by Jess's resource and Mr. Marchbank's generosity, and felt obliged to embark on an explanation as to why he had not written to either of them for so long—an explanation which involved him in such embarrassments that Mr. Marchbanks felt urged to remember the pig's dinner in the middle of it, and they both went out.

That afternoon Daniel cleaned the pigstye, and then, very necessarily, himself, and afterwards set off towards Brakey

Bottom to make his final arrangements with Len, and spend his last night in the disturbing if beloved society of Len's children. But on his way he would call at the Crown.

§ 4

When he came to the inn for the second time, he saw that in the new wing was a properly equipped front-door, with a bell and a letter-box, but somehow he shrank from approaching it, and turned to his old entrance through the bar, even though he knew it would be closed against him.

He knocked, and the door was opened by Maudie Harman.

"Hullo! Daniel! This is good. I heard you'd been in the village, but I never thought you'd come around here. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine. How are you?"

"Fine, too. Reckon you'll have seen Jess at the Rectory. She's quite the lady now with her twelve bob a week."

"I could see that. I'm to live at the Rectory, Maudie, till I find work. Reckon it's a good idea, for there ain't room for me at Brakey Bottom."

"What sort of work are you looking for?"

"Any sort I can get. I've a kid to support now, you know."

"Yes, I heard you'd got a kid. Fancy you, Danny, with a kid!" and Maudie rocked with laughter. "What's he like, Daniel?"

"Well, he ain't like much just yet. Em says he takes after me."

"Was his mother dark or fair?"

"She wasn't neither——" he suddenly found that he did not want to talk to Maudie about Rose. "Who's in just now?"

"They're both in, and ull be unaccountable glad to see you. But you shouldn't ought to have come in this way. There's a front-door now, and a servant to answer the bell—in a cap too. I'm sorry you missed her."

"I'm glad. Let me in this way, Maudie; it's the way always used to come."

"Come on, then. But I'm going to show you the new smoking-room. You've got to see that. Reckon it ain't t be beat outside Eastbourne."

She ushered Daniel into a long low room with French windows, cream walls, and saddle-bag armchairs. It wa hung with sporting prints, and with his own eyes he saw the glories of Ernley's electric light. Maudie switched it o to make the splendour complete.

"There now! See what the Crown has got to! I'm luck to be still here. I feel the next thing ull be a barman in white coat and cocktails. Now don't you touch anythin while I go and find the boss, your hands don't look ove clean."

A whimpering sound came from the room above.

"Babies," said Maudie, as she went out. "We have 'er too. Everybody's got 'em now, seemingly."

She had not been gone a minute before steps sounded i the passage, and the next moment Ernley was in the room gripping both Daniel's hands in his own.

"Thank heaven, you're back. This is splendid, Dan. An you've not changed a bit—except that you look bigger, some how, I wonder why?"

"I dunno. Maybe it's having been married."

Ernley laughed thinly.

"Most men find it makes 'em smaller. . . . Well, any how I'm glad you haven't quarrelled with me, old chap—like Leonard."

"Reckon I'd be sorry to do that."

"I'm glad to hear you say it. I don't really know why h was so mad with me, except that I honestly thought and sai this wretched thing wouldn't have happened if your father' family had looked after him."

"It might or it mightn't," said Dan sagely, sitting dow with extreme care and consciousness of his dirty breeche on the edge of one of the leather armchairs.

"It's easy enough to stop gambling, you know—and people getting drunk, too . . . I believe there was a lot of that."

"Always was."

"But we never have it here, it's a thing that can easily be stopped. You used to stop it yourself when you were at home. You should never have gone away—a silly idea that was, going to stay with your mother's people. They're just a lot of savages. Didn't you think 'em so?"

"Yes, I did, and they thought the same of me."

"Well, I hope they haven't turned you into one. You look different, somehow—cheekier . . . and now I suppose you're out of a job. What do you propose to do?"

"I was wondering if you'd take me on as barman."

"The devil you did. But, joking apart, Daniel, it's a rotten show, looking for work these days. I know many a good chap who's been landed on his uppers. I'm damn lucky to have this place, though sometimes I feel I'd like to burn it down."

"But you're doing well, ain't you?"

"We're doing famously. Think—we're let for Christmas already. . . . Hullo, Belle!"

"Hullo, Daniel," said Belle.

Dan rose scramblingly out of the armchair, as she came into the room.

§ 5

His first impression was that Belle had changed; she had a sleek, trimmed look about her, somehow, different from her old opulent blowziness. Her hair was all smooth and coiled —it must have been in a forgetful moment that Kitty Sheather had seen it hanging on her cheeks like straw—her dress had elegant lines and no immodest gapes, her ankles were silk and her feet shining. Dan had a supreme sensation of awkwardness, of being just a common boy, a common country boy in common clothes with common, clumsy manners, as he scrambled out of the leather armchair, treading on his hat which he had laid beside him on the floor. His

hand, clean with that painful scrubbed cleanness which is so much more damning than dirt, was in Belle's; and then he knew that she wasn't really sleek and trimmed—she only looked it. She had only brushed herself up a bit in his honour and in honour of the Crown; she was really just the old Belle, in spite of her changed life and looks, just as he, in spite of his, was just the old Daniel.

"I'm pleased to see you again, Belle," he said, gripping her hand.

"And I to see you, I'm sure."

She gave a nervous giggle, and he wondered how he ever could have thought her fine.

"I heard your babies crying a minute ago," he said, friendly. "You've got a pair of 'em, I'm told."

"Yes—Jill and Peter. You have one too, haven't you, Daniel?"

"Yes—Thomas Helier, named after his two grandfathers. I'll show him to you, Belle, some day. You'll let me see yourn, won't you?"

Ernley laughed.

"They're not much to look at. I think all children under twelve should be farmed out. It's too humiliating to be reminded at every turn that the early stages of one's life were so entirely animal."

Daniel was shocked at such speech.

"Reckon I'd sooner have a kid about me than most things."

"Don't tell me you're fond of yours."

"Reckon I am—and you of yours, for all your talk."

"I don't deny that I shall be some day. But I'm not now. They're too animal, without an animal's cheapness and independence. Besides, they're a nuisance in a house like this—scare people off. I'll always say that it was because of them we didn't let for October."

"Oh, Ernie, you know they only cancelled it because the gentleman had doctor's orders for the south of France."

"That's what they said, but I've a good idea they'd heard from the Rolands that our youngsters howl o' nights."

"I don't see why the Rolands should complain, their rooms were right on the other side of the house."

"But your precious Jill and Peter made enough noise to raise both sides of the house. I'm not complaining—there's no use complaining of the inevitable—I'm merely pointing to facts, and it's a fact that children in a hotel are bad business."

"But you're doing well, aren't you, Ernley?" said Dan, "seeing as you're let for Christmas."

"Yes, I've the whole place let for Christmas, which certainly isn't bad."

"How many can you hold?"

"Not more than a dozen, but I shall build on a bit more in the spring. We were full all the summer, though we've only a few here now."

"Well, you've gone up while we've gone down, I reckon."

"Yes, and I'm sorry for it—for your side of it, I mean. As for me—well, it's nothing to shout about. I've turned a decent, country pub into a decent, country hotel—that's all. It isn't much when one comes to think of it. When I was crawling over the mud at Wipers, I'd have been devilish upset if some one had told me that was all I'd do with my life. Maybe I shouldn't have been so anxious not to stop a bullet."

Daniel thought Ernley's attitude unthankful. After all, the problems of existence seemed wondrously settled for the landlord of the Crown. He looked round the comfortable room with the saddle-bag armchairs and the sporting prints on the walls; he looked at Ernley, and detected just the faint sketching of a curve under his waistcoat, and then at Belle with her glowing face under her gleaming hair, and thought of her as Ernley's wife, as Ernley's rich and comfortable possession. . . . And there was he, without a home or money or a job or a wife. . . . Some words were ringing in his ears—"And yet the dogs shall eat the crumbs. . . ."

"A penny for your thoughts," said Ernley jocosely.

"You're welcome. I could do with it. I was only thinking I was a bit unlucky—that's all."

"Yes, you've had a pretty stiff time in some ways. But it ull change; you're not the sort to keep down. I wish I could think of something for you, though. I've a plan in my head for buying the stream field and starting a few head of poultry and a couple of cows—'Eggs and milk from the home farm,' you know. But it won't be for a great while yet. Can't Len give you a bit of work, just for your board and keep?"

"No—he's doing that for Christopher."

"Well, he'll house you till you've found something, I reckon."

"I'm going to live along of Mr. Marchbanks."

"The devil you are. Well, you must manage your own affairs."

"What's the matter with this?"

"Oh, nothing. I don't care for Marchbanks, that's all. Visitors don't like his sort. They like a family at the Rectory. Marchbanks doesn't even live like a gentleman."

"He can't afford to."

"Then he shouldn't have taken the living—always bad for a place if the Parson doesn't live in proper style."

"Well, I'd be in a bad way if it wasn't for him, whatever his style. Len hasn't got house-room for me, and I must go somewhere. I reckon Mr. Marchbanks ull keep me till I find work, in exchange for my doing a bit about the garden."

He rose to go, feeling ruffled at Ernley's criticism of his benefactor. Also, it would be past tea-time at Brakey Bottom. . . . As he rose he met Belle's eyes.

"Won't you stay?" she said, "and have a cup of tea with us and see the children."

But her eyes weren't saying that. They were saying: "Please go. I can't bear to see you, all poor and homeless as you are, while I have silk dresses and silk stockings. I'm very sorry for you, Danny, so please go."

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

THE next morning Daniel moved his son and his other belongings over to Bullockdean, borrowing the Brakey Bottom trap. His family were obviously relieved to find that he was making some sort of a home for himself, though they too were inclined to be contemptuous of the poverty and celibacy of Bullockdean Parsonage. There was no denying that, as it happened, the whole thing was mighty convenient. . . . Em, of course, was miserable at having to part with Thomas Helier, and for some time continued to assert tearfully that she could have found room for the two of them somewhere, but Len mistrusted his brother's presence for practical reasons. His temperament brooded over the troubles of the "out-of-work": he foresaw Dan for long weeks unemployed—in winter too, when he could be of no use on the farm—and finally in desperation taking a job under the Sewage Department of the Newhaven Corporation. . . . It was better that his brother should go where he could at least make some appreciable return for his board and keep, and would not be driven into the hasty acceptance of menial offers.

At it happened, Dan's life at the Parsonage involved much of what Len would have thought menial if he had known its details. He had started with the idea that he would look after the pig and garden, clean the boots and carry the coals, while Jess Harman worked indoors, with the scrubbing, dusting, cooking, and the care of Thomas Helier. But after a week or two their positions altered. Dan had always been secretly fond of housework, and on an occasion when Jess was away again in Lewes, it was discovered that he was very much the

better cook of the two. Not in vain had he cooked for his Rose at Moie Fano. . . . Also, he had learned to make coffee in the same school, and for months Mr. Marchbanks had been drinking Jess's tea as the lesser of two evils. . . . So after some friendly discussion the matter was resettled. Jess still had charge of Thomas Helier, except at nights, when she went home to her Auntie's, also of the cleaning and bed-making: but instead of cooking she took over the lighter part of Dan's gardening job, pushed the lawn-mower, and trimmed the borders while he stood in the kitchen, with her sacking apron tied round his waist and his sleeves rolled above his elbows, spelling out slowly from the cookery book which guided his more ambitious efforts.

For as a cook Daniel was ambitious in a way that he had never been as a man. He could not very substantially gratify his ambition on a housekeeping allowance of two pounds a week, but his imagination soared above the hashes and milk-puddings that Jess considered a suitable diet for a country clergyman. He brooded much over the "Entree" division of the cookery-book, he produced a curry and a hot-pot, he attempted, and after three attempts achieved, a rabbit pie.

"Daniel fancies himself, don't he?" Jess would say, when in her capacity of parlourmaid, she would set his latest production before her master.

On the whole the scheme worked well. Daniel liked living with Mr. Marchbanks, and liked working for him. Their friendship was a sound one, for it was accompanied by a certain shyness, which made each appreciate and respectfully leave standing the barriers between them. On one side was Eton and Oxford and a theological college, on the other was the son of the inn, the chucker-out of drunken men, the country boy working with his hands, never quite clean, his mind holding the confused dregs of a board-school education. They met on the common ground of their poverty, both living by contrivance from day to day, Dan bringing his friend the gift of his willing service, and in return sitting

at his feet for the greater necessities of life, the good things he had forgotten while he was in Sark.

He was fond of Jess Harman too, and they went through the day's work as comrades. Soon all difference disappeared between the male and the female tasks, and Mr. Marchbanks never knew whether it was Dan or Jess who would feed the pig or make the beds or mow the lawn or take Thomas Helier out in his push-cart. Jess had produced the push-cart from some unknown source; also, the furniture she had promised for their bedroom—a camp-bed, a crate, a packing case or two, a few hooks, a jug and basin, and a chair. He in his turn had covered everything with a "polished-oak" stain, so successfully that he had been encouraged to apply the treatment to the rest of the house; indeed, he became so enterprising in the way of stains that Mr. Marchbanks was forced into one of his rare acts of self-defence, and shut his study door against the advancing tide of decoration.

Dan found those first weeks of autumn very happy ones, in spite of his continued failure to hear of a job, and a certain feeling of sadness that his mother could so contentedly let him go and live five miles away, when perhaps her intervention would have kept him near her. But he had always tacitly accepted the fact of her preference of Christopher, and his moments of revolt were only occasional and queerly uncomplicated by jealousy, though sometimes he allowed himself the luxury of wondering what she would do when Christopher had married his Mary Wright.

As October wore on into November, he became anxious on the score of his unemployment. It is true that he worked hard for his keep, but he was not actually saving the Rector's money, as he knew that he and the child together cost more than the few shillings Mr. Marchbanks would have paid Tommy Pilbeam or Freddie Pont for the outside work. Thomas Helier was a glutton for milk, and Dan knew that he himself ate a terrible lot—he couldn't help it. He called at the Labour Exchange in Lewes two or three times a

week, and regularly studied the advertisement columns in the *East Sussex Herald* and the *Sussex Daily News*: but it was a bad time to be out of work. Winter was at hand, with stagnation on the farms, and everywhere money was short, economy rife, and labour profuse and rampant.

He soon gave up the hope of finding honourable work on a farm or at an inn, and in time his ambition sank even below the status of Corporation employee which Len had despised. He was not proud—he would stick at nothing. All the same he could not help wondering what his brothers and his mother, or even Jess and Mr. Marchbanks, would think when at last he found a job as conductor of a motor-bus plying between Newhaven and Uckfield.

§ 2

The first person he told about it was Belle. When he came back from the motor-bus company's offices in Lewes, Mr. Marchbanks was out, and Jess was sweeping in some distant part of the house, having left Thomas Helier asleep in his soap-box cradle. Daniel was an adventurous father and, unimpressed by the advantages of a sleeping child, he decided to take his son out for an airing in the push-cart. To be rudely awakened, to have your woolly cap crammed over your head by a well-meaning but male hand, and finally to be strapped sitting up into a push-cart intended for a child three times your age, is an accumulation of pains not to be suffered in silence, and Thomas Helier was not silent.

"What are you doing, Dan?" shouted Jess out of an upstairs window, as they went down the Parsonage drive.

"Taking out the kid."

"That's plain enough—poor little mite! Why couldn't you leave him alone? He was sleeping beautiful."

"It ain't healthy for him to be always indoors."

"He ain't always indoors. You are a meddler, Daniel."

"Well, he's my own child. I can do what I like with him."

"Oh, hark to that now! There's a Christian father! Poor little soul, his cap's right over his face. Really, I'll be thankful when you've got a job and won't come interfering. . . ."

Dan walked out of earshot, rather haughtily, and as soon as he saw he was out of eyeshot too, he stopped and pulled the baby's cap off his eyes, tickled his neck, and otherwise tried to propitiate him. But Thomas Helier still howled mightily, and at that moment Belle appeared.

"Hullo, Daniel!—and you've got the baby!"

She came and stooped over the push-cart. Dan wished she could have found his son in a more engaging mood, but he saw that her eyes were both eager and tender as she looked into the crimson furious little face.

"Poor little soul! He isn't comfortable. May I lift him out, Daniel?"

"Of course, you may, Belle."

"He isn't old enough really to sit up in a push-cart. There, there, my beautiful—I've got you. Isn't that better, my gem?"

The soft curve of her arm was under Thomas Helier's backbone; his yelling died suddenly down.

"Is this the first time you've seen him?" asked Daniel.

"Oh, I've seen him about now and then, but this is the first time I've held him—there's a sweet—there's a lovely boy."

"I never knew you was fond of children," said Daniel, idiotically.

"I don't know that I ever thought about them much till I had them of my own. You like my Jill and Peter, don't you?"

"Reckon I do, though I haven't seen much of them, either."

"You haven't seen much of any of us. I expect you've been busy."

"Yes, I've had a lot to do for Mr. Marchbanks, and I've been looking for work besides."

"Haven't you heard of anything yet?"

"I've just got a job this morning."

"What sort of a job?"

"Oh, a grand job. I'm to be conductor on the Downs Omnibus Company's bus between Newhaven and Uckfield. I shall wear a fine coat with brass buttons. You'll be proud to know me."

He laughed without malice. She was wearing a fur coat, and a velvet cap pulled low over the golden hanks of her hair. Beside her was a man who was glad to get thirty shillings a week as conductor of a country 'bus—a man who had loved her, whose arms had held her, before she wore fur and velvet.

"Well, I'm glad you've found something, though I wish it had been better. Will your hours be long?"

"Nine till seven—and I've got to get to and from Newhaven."

"It sounds heavy, but I suppose you'll have half a day off and your Sundays."

"Yes, I'll have that."

"You must come and see us when you're free. Ernley was saying only yesterday that he's scarcely seen you since you came back to Bullockdean."

"I've been cooking for them at the Rectory, and doing a lot of work besides, as well as going in to the Labour Exchange three times a week. I've meant to come round a dunnamany times. Now I've got a job maybe I'll be able to look in now and then after supper."

"Come and have supper with us."

"Reckon you'll have too grand suppers for me these days."

"Don't talk nonsense, Daniel. We won't have it with the visitors—not that we think you aren't 'grand' enough, but we'd much rather be by ourselves."

"Don't you like the visitors?"

Belle shrugged, and laughed a little ruefully.

"I dunno—they scare me, somehow—at least our sort do.

Such ladies and gentlemen! 'Do you know that your chamber-maid doesn't wipe out the basins when she empties them?' I'd never heard of such a thing till I came here, though I never let on I hadn't—not even to Ernley. Dan, I wasn't meant to be a hotel-keeper's wife."

"It's a difficult job, but you look very well in it, Belle."

"Do I?" she asked almost eagerly. "Do you think I've improved?"

"Yes, you're more elegant somehow. And I like your clothes—not but that I didn't like the old ones."

"Oh, they were rubbish, and I was always untidy. I'm often untidy still, but Ernley's taught me a lot. He's dreadfully particular about what I wear and what I look like."

"Well, reckon he must be pleased, anyway."

She seemed touched by his good will.

"Dan you don't—I mean, you've quite forgiven me for the way I treated you all that time ago?"

Perhaps she ought not to have said it till they had knit together more strands of their severed acquaintance, but she could not help it.

"It wasn't forgiving I had to do, but forgetting," he said slowly.

"But you've done that."

"Yes, I've done it now—sure enough."

There was a moment's awkward silence. Then he said:

"Anyways, I'm uncommon glad we're friends again. It was terrible being shut of you and Ernley. . . . I must come around and see old Ernie as soon as ever I can."

"Come and see him now. He'll be in by tea-time, and till then we can sit in the nursery and watch the babies. I'd like to see how mine and yours get on together."

The idea pleased Daniel, and they walked on towards the Crown, Belle still carrying the peaceful Thomas Helier. It was rather wonderful, Daniel thought, that, after all, she should carry his child in her arms.

§ 3

The nursery at the Crown was in the new wing, and a beautiful room with a frieze of nursery rhymes, and a crawling-pen beside the fire. Dan's eyes opened wide at the sight of it and at the sight of the nurse in uniform.

"Lord, but you are fine, Belle! Reckon this is a grand place for kids . . . and look at their toys, too."

He realised for the first time that Thomas Telier had no toys. He was rather young for any, it is true; nevertheless, Dan experienced his first real pang of envy as he looked at the shelf on which sat a Teddy-bear, Pip and Squeak, and other more indefinite animals.

Belle sat down by the fire with Thomas Helier on her knee, and held up a woolly ball before him. He stretched out his hands, and kicked delightedly. It was wonderful how she managed him, thought Daniel—better than Jess, better certainly than his poor father. As he looked at her, it seemed as if the lines of her face had changed, had grown softer, more maternal. From a wanton, Belle had become a mother. Had her heart roved only till it had found this, its real desire?

Her own children were two fair, sturdy little creatures—one about two years old, the other the same age as Thomas Helier. They wore little silk smocks that made Dan painfuly conscious of his son's limitations as a well-dressed baby. It was a pity that he would kick in that ecstatic way and show what inevitably suggested comparisons. He tried to straighten his legs upon Belle's lap, but Thomas Helier only kicked harder, while otherwise grossly testifying his delight in the situation.

"What a darling he is! Come and look at him, Jill. Look at the dear little baby."

But the little Munks were as uninterested as small children usually are in each other. Their curiosity centered in Daniel.

"Tick-tick," demanded Jill.

"Ain't got none," said Dan.

But Jill's experience did not so far include man as apart from watch; once more she demanded:

"Tick-tick."

"Don't bother him, darling, he hasn't got a tick-tick. But he's got a dear little boy just Peter's age. Come and look at him."

"Ugh," said Jill at the sight of Thomas Helier. Then she gripped Dan's trouser leg and repeated, "Tick-tick."

Both Dan and Belle laughed.

"Aren't children funny," said Belle. "I'm glad you're laughing, Daniel. But don't let her worry you. I'm afraid I don't always realise what a nuisance she is. Ernley says these two annoy the visitors, and the trouble is I can't see it, so don't stop it."

He noticed that she seemed unable to speak of Ernley without some sort of self-depreciation.

"Well, you can't keep children in a house as if they was rabbits," he remarked sagely. "They're bound to spannel about a bit. Look at mine; he almost fills the Rectory, as you might say. It's lucky Mr. Marchbanks don't mind, though sometimes he'll yell o'nights as if it was blue murder. If Mr. Marchbanks don't mind, I don't see why Ernley should, seeing as he's the father, which Mr. Marchbanks ain't, though he's got to put up with it all the same."

"Oh, Ernley doesn't mind for himself. It's for the visitors. You've no idea what a difference it's made, him having charge of this hotel. While his father was alive and ran it, he didn't bother about it much, but now it's all the world to him. . . . Hark! there he is, I believe," as a motorcycle was heard in the street. "We'll go downstairs, if it is, Daniel, as he likes to find his tea ready."

§ 4

The motor-cyclist proved to be Ernley and he was delighted to see Daniel, and they all three had a comfortable, friendly tea together in the smoking-room of the Crown.

They talked about Dan's new work, which amused Ernley very much.

"I'll come for a ride in your 'bus—we both will. But look here, my boy, directly I settle about that river land and start the farm, you'll come to me. That's settled."

"I'd be glad to come, Ernie, but reckon I ain't experienced enough. You'll want some one more used to that kind of job. I've been a barman and a fisherman and I'll have been a 'bus conductor, but I guess none of them ull show me how to look after chickens."

"Nonsense. You've kept poultry at the George and a pig at the Parsonage, to say nothing of having helped on your uncle's farm in Sark. I shan't run a big affair—only a few fowls and pigs, and a cow or two. But maybe it'll all come to nothing; it depends on the price Lord Gage ull take. We haven't got a terrible lot of capital at the Crown—all the money goes in improvements. . . ." Dan was beginning to discover that the subject of the Crown was a bottomless well into which dropped most of Ernley's conversations. This one went in deeper and deeper, till at last Dan began to have uneasy thoughts of Thomas Helier's bedtime and Jess Harman's wrath at its delay.

"Reckon I must be taking the kid back home. Thank you, Belle, for the cup of tea. Glad to have seen you, Ernley."

Ernley tried to keep him, but Belle, knowing the importance of a baby's bedtime, herself fetched Thomas Helier and packed him as comfortably as might be into the push-cart. Then at the last moment, she stooped and put beside him the woolley ball.

"Let him take it home. He loved playing with it so."

For a moment Dan had no voice to thank her. Thomas Helier's reproach among babies had been taken away—and taken away by Belle, with a gesture which made him realise how little of her he had really lost.

CHAPTER THREE

THERE was some vexation at Brakey Bottom when it was discovered that Dan had become the conductor of the Uckfield 'bus, but there was really very little to be done in the way of protest, beyond words, which were plentiful. Besides, he was earning thirty shillings a week, fifteen of which he paid his mother: therefore he had solved the financial problem of those days.

The work was arduous, but he liked it—it was so personal—and it involved the active, physical service which had always appealed to an officious element in him. Dan liked helping old women with heavy baskets, children on their way from school, mothers with large families inclined to spread about the 'bus. He also liked throwing out drunken men who tried to travel without a ticket—it was like old times at the George—and "sassing back" the people who rode on hisn 'bus and then scolded him because it wasn't the 'bus for Chailey or Seaford. There was nothing aloof or detached or inhuman about conducting a 'bus, especially when it was a 'bus which jogged and meandered through country lanes, linking up farms and small villages, taking its regular freight of farm-stuff and farm-people, as well as the interest of strangers, or a tramp with a few halfpence to spare for a ride.

Daniel's day went by rule, or he never could have done in it as much as he did. Every morning he was up at six, to feed the pig and attend to any household jobs that, in his opinion, could not wait till Jess Harman appeared at the more reasonable hour of eight. Then on most mornings he would represent the village of Bullockdean at its altar. As he lived at the Parsonage, it seemed natural that this function should be his more often than Tommy Philbeam's or

Freddie Pont's or other youths' whose punctuality was more uncertain. It was rather a strain on his already overfilled day, but Dan would have done much more for Mr. Marchbanks, who had housed and fed him when his own family were reluctant to do so, and still bore with Thomas Helier's crying o'nights. . . . So there stood Mr. Marchbanks looking rather like a big green beetle, and there knelt Daniel trying how much of the Confession he could say in one breath, and there behind them lay the darkness and emptiness of Bullockdean Church. It was bitterly cold, as they could not afford to have the heating on week-days, but he soon grew warm in the hurry back to the Parsonage, with perhaps a turn at Jess Harman's broom, or a few minutes at the fire with a sluggish kettle. Half-an-hour for breakfast and washing up—three quarters of an hour for the tramp into Newhaven—when he had saved some money he would buy a bicycle—and at nine o'clock he was incredibly at the Downs Motor Company's office in Bridge Road, ready to start out on their first 'bus.

It was as well that he was warm and glowing with all his haste, for the overcoat with the brass buttons was not of the thickest material, and it was cold work standing on the back step of a 'bus in winter-time. They would take a few farm-labourers out of Newhaven, men employed on farms outside the town, who could not find cottages near their work. These would be set down all along the road between Newhaven and Southease, and others picked up and carried on to other farms; for it was the same all over the district, and the old-time labourer's right to live on the ground he tilled was lost and the loss accepted.

The 'bus did not take the direct route from Lewes to Uckfield, but an eccentric road of its own, looping to include villages a mile or so away—Ringmer and the Broyle—then turning abruptly north to East Hoathly, and up to Framfield by Iron Peatree. They were as a rule pretty empty by then, for it was past ten o'clock and the farmmen were all at their work and the children were all in

school, and it was too early for more casual road-traffic. Between Framfield and Uckfield they might pick up a few early shoppers, but they often ran empty into the town. For half-an-hour the 'bus stood outside the Maiden's Head, while Dan and the motor-man smoked their fags; then she went out again by Bird-in-Eye, generally well loaded. As she ran back through Hoathly and Ringmer her load increased, and she would often enter Lewes quite full. On market day there would be tremendous packs and crushes, and Dan would pull the bell, shouting, "Full up, please," guarding the entrance with a sturdy arm.

They made this journey twice a day, leaving Newhaven at nine and three. In a week or so Dan knew every scrap of the road by heart, every hill, every haystack. He depended on the passengers for any variety in his day, and they themselves seemed to follow a well-worn rule—farm-men out of Newhaven, old women shoppers into Uckfield, young women shoppers into Lewes in the morning and cinema-goers in the evening. Now and then there would be small excitements: once they took a wedding-party from Lewes to Rushy Green, the bride very shy, the bridegroom ashamed, and the guests uproarious: another time a young woman felt ill in the 'bus, and held Dan's hand for a mile. And there were always parcels that were left behind, and children that were sick, or had lost the pennies they had been given for their fares . . . so altogether he found the life exciting, and felt pleasurably thrilled and tired when eight o'clock saw him back at Bullockdean, hungry for supper after his dinner of bread and cheese.

He had the whole of Wednesday afternoon off to attend to the garden, and his Sundays were always free, and spent at Brakey Bottom. Here he would console his mother, who smarted much under Christopher's courtship of his Mary Wright, which took him away to Exceat Bridge every Sunday. Dan knew that her displayed affection was intended rather as a rebuke to one son than as a reward to the other; nevertheless, he rejoiced in those new caresses of provoca-

tion, and would give her in return those which were not coiners' money but the currency of true love. Of other comfort he could give but little, for the situation was outside his understanding. He was wounded and puzzled by his mother's selfishness in trying to thwart her son in the chief business of a man's life, and his own experience made it hard for him to realise a love which could be given to a wife only at the expense of a mother. Still, his whole philosophy and tendency was to take what he could get and be thankful, and he was glad to feel a little boy again with his head on his mother's shoulder, even though he knew that her arm drew him really close only when Christopher came and stood in the doorway, staring at them with shadowed eyes.

The spare moments of the day were spent with Len, pottering round the farm and lending a sympathetic ear to his grievances; or else Ivy and Leslie would be waiting for him with their "Snake Ladders," still only partly superseded by a race-game with motor-cars. Meanwhile, Emmie "went over" Thomas Helier, as she put it—sewed on buttons and let down tucks and otherwise repaired the omissions of the week. She would have taken charge of him altogether, but Dan was very insistent that he had "got used" to him, and at the end of the day invariably packed him into the push-cart and trundled him home. What would Jess Harman say, he wondered, if he came back without him?—or Mr. Marchbanks, with all his strict notions on the duties of parents to children, which was what he always preached about, him being a bachelor, instead of the old-fashioned duties of children to parents that the village was used to. Or, for that matter, what would he say himself if he broke his one link with *"la chère épouse de Daniel le Couteur,"* asleep under the ilex trees?—that golden Rose with the laughing name, whose love had given him no pain or fear or sorrow but had grown up in his heart like a rose, and, like a rose, in death was still sweet.

No, he would not part with Thomas Helier, even to the

kind Emmie, who would care for him better than either Jess Harman or his own father. He would wheel him home down the ruts of the Telscombe lane—if Len were too busy to put the mare to and give them a lift as far as the high-road—and then down the road, almost in the ditch to avoid the great cars that swept by, till the sign-post pointed them once more into the byeways. Then at last they would trundle between the lights of the George and the Crown, spilled together in one pool in the midst of Bullockdean Street, and find the Rectory dark, with Mr. Marchbanks and Jess Harman still in church. Shut out by his possession of Thomas Helier both from church and tavern, Dan would take him into the kitchen, to the red gleeds of the fire, and put him into his cradle, while he heated his milk, and thought with equal regret of the beer he might have drunk and the hymns he might have sung.

CHAPTER FOUR

§ 1

DURING the first weeks of his new work Dan had not much time to spare for calling at the Crown. He was generally so tired when he came in of an evening that he could think only of supper and bed. His Wednesday afternoons were full of long arrears of work in house and garden, and his Sundays were spent at Brakey Bottom. But shortly before Christmas, he unexpectedly met Ernley in Lewes High Street. It was a rainy night, and he had just come off at the last 'bus, which had been run into Lewes for repairs, when he saw him turn the corner out of Station Road. Munk hailed him with gratifying eagerness.

"Hallo, old Daniel! it's good to see you. Where are you going?"

"I'm just starting home."

"Come in and have a bite of something with me, and I'll run you back in the side-car. I've wanted a talk with you this age, but I never seem to see you anywhere."

"I've been wonderful busy on the 'bus."

"I bet you have, and you look as if it suited you. You're a marvellous chap, Daniel."

"In what way?"

"Oh, leading the life you do and keeping well and cheery with it all."

"It ain't a bad life."

"It's a shocking life, and I'm ashamed that you should have to lead it. But it doesn't seem as if I'd ever get that farm going. The tenant won't go out. You know old Bream's had the brook lands since Burnt Oak was divided and I can't quite get round Lord Gage on the price."

"Oh, I'm right enough, I don't have much time to worry."

"Well, come and feed, anyhow. We'll go to the White Hart."

A few minutes later they were sitting in the warmth of the coffee-room, the day's rain steaming off Daniel's clothes.

"I'm uncommonly glad to see you, Dan. D'you know—it's so good having you back again, and finding that. . ." He stopped a little before he need, to take the bill of fare from the waitress.

They had chops and tomatoes, with porter, followed by treacle roll and coffee. Daniel was in high spirits. It was months since he had had such a meal on a week-day, and he was pleased to find that he and Ernie had slipped back so happily into the old relationship. Distrust and jealousy were gone, and Ernie was talking to him as in the old times, laying down the law on politics, racing, farming, and inn-keeping—chiefly the last.

Afterwards they had coffee, and Ernie had two brandies. These seemed to turn his conversation into more personal channels. He finished a sentence he had begun before dinner.

"It's so good having you back again, and finding that we've got over all that muddle—you and me—about Belle, you know."

"Yes, I'm glad of that."

"When I heard you were coming back, I wasn't sure how you'd have got over it. You'd been away two years and you'd married another girl, but somehow I'd an idea you might come back feeling pretty much the same—about me, I mean . . . thinking I'd taken Belle from you and suchlike."

"I never thought you'd taken her from me, Ernie—she'd left me before she went back to you."

"But she left you because of me—she told me she did. It seems that I was troubling her more or less all the time. Queer, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's queer."

Dan had a sudden memory, so acute as to be almost a

vision, of himself facing Belle in the little parlour at Three Cups Corner, and for the first time since his return some of the misery of those days came back to him. He felt his love for Belle driving through his heart—not as an actual reality, but as a memory too much alive. He said no more, but sat in silence, smoking one of Ernley's cigarettes.

Munk dropped the stump of his own into his coffee.

"Damn it all, Dan—now you're at it, I can talk to you. There's no one else I can talk to, for I never was much of a chap for making friends. Now tell me,—when you saw Belle and me together, what did you think of us?"

"I thought—I thought you were all right. Don't tell me I was wrong."

"You weren't very sharp. But of course—oh, I suppose one tries to hide these things."

"What things?"

"That one's making one's wife unhappy."

"You ain't never telling me that!"

His heart began to beat quickly with sickness and anger.

"Yes, I am. Did you think I'd stopped doing it just because I'd married her? No, I haven't. I've gone on like I always did. But the queer thing is that though marriage hasn't changed me, it's changed her. She's become something different. You know what Belle always used to be—the wild, roving kind, out for passion. I never thought she'd turn into the mother-kind of woman—children first husband nowhere. . . ."

"Come Ernley—that isn't true."

"Maybe it isn't. That's just what's wrong with me. I exaggerate everything. The truth is that Belle's turned into a thoroughly good wife and mother, and I don't appreciate it."

"That wild kind often does. It's what they're out after all along, though maybe they don't know it."

"Then she ought to have married you."

"What nonsense! She didn't love me."

"She'd have loved you if you'd married her. I know it's my own fault that she didn't, and it's right I should be punished for it, but not right that she should be."

"It seems to me you're talking some unaccountable rubbish. Belle ud never have been happy along of me. I'm too quiet for her. But she'd be happy enough along of you if you weren't always criticising her and pulling out your feelings to look at 'em and make other people look at 'em when they don't want to."

"I'm sorry, Dan. I know you don't want to, but you must. If you don't, Belle will have to. It does me good to have things out, and it's such ages since I had anyone to talk to —openly. I can't talk to Belle. She thinks I'm unnatural, because I don't care for spending all my spare time in the nursery."

"You'll never tell me you ain't fond of those kids."

"Oh I am—I am. But I don't want them always—hearing them when I don't see them. I want my wife."

"Well, reckon you've got her."

"But not as I'd like to have her. I want my old Belle as she used to be."

"No one ud be madder than you if you had."

"I don't mean looking and behaving as she used to. But I want my old fires lit."

Dan shivered.

"I know it's not her fault, but I feel they'd have gone on blazing if she hadn't changed like this—run all to wifehood in a way I'd never have thought. . . . Perhaps I shouldn't have minded so much if the change had been of another kind—if she'd turned sleeker and more sophisticated. D'you remember Pearl?"

Dan nodded grimly.

"Well, she was my ideal woman—outwardly. I shouldn't have quarrelled with Belle if she'd taken to that sort of thing. But she's as untidy as ever—only without the blaze somehow. I can't see love in this jog-trot way. You can. That's why she'd better have married you."

"Adone do, with your talk of Belle marrying me! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"So I ought, and if she had married you I shouldn't have been any happier. For the queer thing is that I love her."

"I don't see as it's at all queer."

"Not queer that I should be able to stand outside like this and curse and criticise, and yet feel that somehow, in spite of it all, I could never live without her?"

Dan put out his cigarette with an unsteady hand.

"Have another?"

"No thanks."

"You're not mad with me, are you, Daniel? It's not quite my fault. We're all such insects when we try to live—flies dancing over stagnant water . . . that's love—a dance of flies."

Daniel rose to his feet.

"Well I must be going now."

"I have made you angry, then."

"Only a bit."

"I tell you it's not my fault—unless being what I am's my fault, as I daresay it is. What you are doesn't matter in love, but it matters in marriage. Women ask so much more of marriage than a man does. God knows what Belle wants. She hasn't got it, anyway."

Dan felt in the midst of Ernley's speech as a man feels who sinks slowly into a swamp. With an effort he threw himself out of it.

"All she wants is for you to be kind and good to her, and speak kind, and care for her and the children, and understand all the trouble she has with them and the place. She doesn't want much, but maybe more than you can spare from yourself."

The colour rose in Ernley's cheeks and for a moment they faced each other in an angry silence. Then Munk spoke quite calmly.

"Don't let's quarrel, Dan. I couldn't bear another separation. I'm sorry if I've upset you about Belle. I know I

exaggerate things. If you'll stay my friend, you'll help us both a lot."

The appeal found Dan's vulnerable part. His wrath collapsed, and he felt a little ashamed of it.

"I'm sorry I spoke rough, but hearing you talk on and on like that . . ."

He said no more, and they went out together.

§ 2

Nevertheless, he could not quite get rid of his anger. When Ernley had left him at Bullockdean Parsonage, and he was alone with Thomas Helier in the little bedroom that Jess had garnished, he still felt shaken and affronted. He felt affronted, somehow, by Ernley's confidence. Ernley had always been like that—taking too much for granted. Now he was taking for granted that Daniel had "got over" his affair with Belle. Dan had taken it for granted himself, for the matter of that, till an hour ago; but Ernley's cool assumption of his indifference had somehow destroyed it. What right had Ernie to think he was made like that?—that he could forget all those beautiful moments that had come to him with Belle? Of course, it was true that he had married another woman and been happy with her, but that was different. He had not been in love with Rose Falla when he married her: he had married her out of pity and repentance, and love had somehow afterwards been made of their common life. If Rose had still been alive, he would not have thought of Belle, and never of those beautiful moments of passion. But Rose was dead, and with her his life in Sark was dead, and all the years and changes that separated him from his love for Belle.

He had got into bed because of the cold, but he could not sleep. He lay awake, starring at the ceiling and the pattern of leaves that moved there in the moonlight. The night was still—dreadfully still. . . . Thomas Helier lay quiet in his cradle, though for the first time in his life Dan

would have welcomed any distraction he chose to provide. He did not like lying awake with his thoughts. He had no business to be thinking of Belle like this, for though Rose was dead Ernley was alive. Curse him!—not for being married to Belle—Daniel was still very far from that—but for being all unworthy of his marriage—of any marriage. Ernley didn't know so much as the A.B.C. of married life—he'd no idea how to behave as a husband. Dan thought of the cottage at Moie Fano and of the marriage that had begun without love, without common tastes, without even a common language, and yet had been a thing of pure and perfect happiness. . . . In marriage you had to be tender, to put yourself in her place, to realise that she was made different from you, though she was flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone. . . . And Ernley went about showing her his feelings, like a lot of tripe. . . . The simile rushed into his mind as an expression of the almost physical disgust which he felt at Ernley's confidences. He never used to mind his confidences. He never used to mind his confidences, amorous or otherwise, but now somehow he couldn't stomach them. . . . Ernley was eaten up with himself, and that was why his marriage was unhappy. He had nothing else to make it so. Belle had got shut of her bad ways, as Daniel had always felt sure she would; she had given him two dear little children and her one thought was to please him. And he went about grumbling for his "old fires." Silly fool! Didn't know as much about love as Daniel whom he'd always looked upon as a child in such matters? "Old fires"—put them out! They only made the place hot and dangerous, they weren't the sort of fires you could ever boil a kettle on.

A clock somewhere in the house struck two, and Dan was seized with the workingman's horror of a sleepless night, knowing that at whatever hour he slept he must rise for toil as usual. It was a bad thing lying awake like this, and his reason for it was bad. If he was really beginning to feel about Belle like this again, he had better clear out. Of

course, it was natural that he should fret about two friends making each other unhappy, but this acuteness of trouble was wrong. Maybe he was overtired. . . . Well he'd be tireder yet before he'd done with tomorrow.

§ 3

Indeed, he went through the next day little more than half-awake. The hum and rumble of the 'bus, the heavy rush of the wind as it tore after them down the roads and eddied round him on the back step, swept him into a drowsiness which was sometimes actual sleep. He slept standing on his platform for brief dangerous minutes. He had always been able to sleep on his legs, and he enjoyed these stolen naps, but he was aware of their criminality in a 'bus conductor. He slept past the turning to Clay Hill on the Halland Road, with the result that an elderly clergyman who had been marketing in Lewes and seemed as tired as Daniel himself had to walk back half a mile to the sign-post, laden with bags from which were bursting loaves of bread, potatoes, cheese, and other fare for Poverty Parsonage. After that he kept awake.

He was half asleep again when he walked up Bullockdean Street at the end of the day, and it was as in a dream that at the Rectory gate he met Belle Shackford. She was certainly Belle Shackford, and not Belle Munk, for she came to him out of the moonlight looking exactly as in the old days—all her sleekness gone. Her hair was rough and towish under the moon, which was bright enough to show him also her careless tam-o'-shanter cap, and the piece of dyed catfur that lay at odds upon her shoulders. Thus he had seen Belle years ago on many a winter's night, with her hair upon her cheeks and the gleam of sham pearls upon her neck, with transparent silk stockings and cracked patent leather shoes showing under the frayed hem of her coloured coat, and about her the strong cloying whiff of cheap scent, at once enticing and disgusting him.

"Hullo, Belle!" he greeted her. "Where have you been?"

"Over to Batchelors'. Lucy's been giving a party. She's going to be married at last, you know, and her boy's people have been over, and we've had a bit of a dance. I'm tired."

"You don't tell me you've walked back all by yourself?"

"Why not? It isn't far by the down and the moon's lovely. Ernie wanted to fetch me, but I knew he was busy, it being so near Christmas, and I'm always a bit nervous when he comes over to Batchelors'. He and my dad don't hit it off."

"That's a pity."

"It is. But Ernley doesn't understand Dad, and of course I own he's troublesome, having an idea that I've married money, and so ought to support the old home. Twice he's tried to borrow money off Ernie, and twice they've had a row about it."

"Is your father in a bad way, then?"

"Oh, he's sure to bust sooner or later. Most farmers do these days. When Lucy gets married, there'll be one less for the work, and he can't afford another man. I'm sorry about it all, which worries Ernie. He says, I oughtn't to feel I belong there any more."

"Well, I don't see that you've got any call to worry about Batchelors', after the way they've treated you."

"Oh, they haven't treated me badly. It's always like that in a big, poor family. You've got to work hard and you have rows. I don't say I was never to blame. But we're all friendly enough now."

She sighed, almost as if she regretted Batchelors' with its toiling, quarreling ways. Then she asked:

"How are you getting on, Dan?"

"Oh, well, enough, it's hard work, but healthy."

"Do you get Christmas off?"

"Only the day."

"Well, you must come and see us some evening when you're free. What about supper? You promised us weeks ago that you'd come to supper."

Daniel hesitated. He felt unwilling in part—in part too eager.

"Do come," said Belle.

"Well, I'd like to . . ."

"Wednesday's your afternoon off, isn't it. Come next Wednesday."

Daniel struggled in himself. He asked in himself, "Who'll I meet?—Belle Shackford or Belle Munk?" But all he could say outwardly was:

"Thank you kindly. I'd like to come."

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

DANIEL knew he was a fool to go to supper at the Crown. If he was beginning to feel like this again about Belle, he ought to keep away from her. There was no good telling himself that he was going to see Ernie, he had plenty of opportunities for seeing Ernie without his wife. No—he might as well be honest—he was going because he wanted to see Belle, and also—to be frank as well as honest—because it would be a treat to have supper at the Crown. He wondered what they would have to eat . . . chops, sausages, cutlets . . . a fowl, even. . . . And he would be able to sit and talk to Belle, to watch her mouth when she laughed, and the big column of her throat, and her hair that would be like spun sugar in the glow of the new electric light. . . . He was a fool to think of going, but of course he went.

When Wednesday came, he devoted nearly an hour to his preparations. First he had a comprehensive wash at the sink, then he changed into his Sunday clothes, put on new-blacked boots, and sleeked his hair with some hair-cream specially bought in Lewes. It would never do to appear a shabby fellow. He was just setting out, when he met Mr. Marchbanks, who surveyed him nervously.

"What time ull you be back?"

"Ten o'clock. Jess says she'll stay till then."

Mr. Marchbanks coughed.

"Dan—you feel—you feel quite settled in your mind about Mrs. Munk, don't you? I mean, you've quite got over all that, or you wouldn't—"

Dan suddenly found himself angry.

"Well, if I haven't got over it all, seeing as I've been married and widowed and got a kid . . . and I don't see why you've any call to think such things of me."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't really think it. I merely wanted to put you on your guard. She is a very charming woman, and, of course, it isn't easy to forget. . . ."

"Ho, isn't it!" cried Daniel as he walked out.

He felt highly indignant all the way down the drive. What right had Mr. Marchbanks to interfere? But then he'd always been like that with Belle—disapproving. It was the one thing he couldn't get on with in Mr. Marchbanks—his ideas about women and love . . . afraid of everything. You'd think he'd had some kind of upset himself and got scared.

But by the time Dan had reached the village, he too was scared—so scared in fact that he went into the George and had a pint of Hobday & Hitch's before he dared go into the Crown. The young man at the George now knew who he was, and they often exchanged confidences about the management of an inn. The George was a quiet place now, entertaining only a farm-labourer or two, and paying its way even more uncertainly than in the days of Thomas Sheather. Certainly, the ale was bad, but Dan obtained a slight comfort from it, though probably his reassurance was chiefly due to the few minutes spent in old beloved surroundings—the familiar sawdusted floor, the low, beamed ceiling, blackened by the oil lamp that still hung from it, the familiar advertisements of Buchanan's whisky on the walls, the beer-handles that he himself had pushed to and from behind the counter for so long.

He went out feeling comforted for the evening's adventure. The Crown was brilliantly lit up, pouring the reflections of its electric light into the road and across it into the dim, lamp-lit windows of the George. Above it the blackness of its roof rose sleepily into the dark sky, where a single star hung remote from the dazzle of Bullockdean Street. Dan looked at the star, and thought of another

which he had seen in pictures, shining above an inn at Christmas-time. Three wise men had followed a star right across the world, and it had brought them to a common inn. They must have had a shock. It was curious how his thoughts of Belle seemed mixed with that story of another inn. He remembered how he had dreamed of her when he was in Sark, in the stable with her baby at Christmas time. Perhaps his love for her was not the wicked thing Mr. Marchbanks thought it.

But there was no good standing mooning in the street. He went up to the doorbell, and faced the parlourmaid, who brought him into the Munks' private sitting-room, where they both waited. To-night Belle surprisingly wore black, and Dan was abashed not only by the return of her sleekness but by the deepening of her beauty. The black made her skin like milk and her hair like honey. It gave her an air of pale delicacy which he had never seen her wear before. It was a delicacy of colour rather than of outline. In outline she was still the richly-moulded, splendid Belle whose bigness he had loved.

They spoke together rather awkwardly till dinner was ready, for it was certainly dinner and not supper to which he had been invited. It was served in the hotel dining-room, where the visitors already sat in high-class dispersal, and Dan's eyes opened wide at the sight of the two waitresses in black and white uniforms who brought in the soup.

"Lord, Ernley, but you have come on!"

Ernley smiled complacently.

"Yes, we haven't done so badly. As I used to say to poor dad, 'It pays to launch out a bit.' We were quite full for Christmas, though we're slacking again now."

It struck Daniel that Ernley was looking extremely prosperous, in spite of his inward distress. There was certainly a curve under his waistcoat and his jaw was thicker. But his heart was lean withal. Except when he talked about the hotel, he had all his old questing bitterness. He talked

like Ernley in the trenches, though he looked very different from the Ernley of those days.

"Egad, you're a lucky fellow, Dan. You look straight ahead of you and don't worry about what's at the side. If you had this pub now, there'd be nothing else you'd want."

"Reckon there would be a fat lot I'd want," said Dan, who resented this description of himself.

"Well, I mean a wife and children with it, of course. You wouldn't go wanting to look beyond the horizon. You'd be satisfied with the common business of life. I believe you're satisfied now, even as you are."

"I ain't, but I haven't got it in me to make a fuss about things like you."

Ernley seemed pleased at this, and laughed. Dan was beginning once more to find him irritating, but he would not let his feelings betray him any further. Not only was he Ernley's guest, eating his very good food, but he did not want to give any added distress to Belle by goading her husband. He watched Belle secretly while he ate, watched for any expression of her face or speech which should betray her feelings. Was Ernley really making her unhappy as he thought he was, or was she merely accepting him with that motherly toleration which is so often the female response to male unreasonableness?

He could not tell, for she sat very nearly silent. Indeed, the conversation being little more than a monologue by Ernley, it would have been difficult for her to do otherwise. But he noticed that she did not smile—as she might have, pityingly or comprehendingly—though this again he should not have expected, for it had never been Belle's way to smile at men except in allurement.

After supper, which though a little distressing on the human side had been most comforting in the matter of food and drink, they returned to the sitting-room, where Belle took out some sewing and Ernley went on talking. He talked about the French occupation of the Ruhr, laying down

the law uncontradicted by Daniel, who had little interest in or understanding of post-war politics in their larger issues. The rise and fall of prices, the difficulties in the way of getting work, the gradual withdrawal of industrial and agricultural guarantees—that was how the hinder-parts of the Great War looked to Daniel and some millions like him. Matters of stability, economy, and reparation were all by him vaguely classified as "talk," and it seemed queer to him that the politicians should go right away to Paris for their talking when the unemployed were parading the streets of Lewes and Newhaven.

In the midst of Ernley's talk a waitress came in and told him that he was wanted on the telephone. He threw his cigarette into the grate and went out, leaving Daniel and Belle to entertain each other on lower intellectual levels. No sooner had he shut the door behind him than Belle looked uneasy.

"I think I hear the children," she said, and going to the door she opened it and listened. The house was silent, save for Ernley's distant voice on the telephone. She came back into the room, but did not return to her old chair, sitting down instead on one nearer the door, which she had left open.

"I don't hear any kids," said Daniel.

"No."

The monosyllable came blankly, and he suddenly realised that she was listening intently—listening to Ernley's voice.

"The children are very quiet as a rule," she continued. Then shut her mouth and listened again.

Dan had a sudden dreadful intuition that she doubted the innocence of Ernley's telephone call. She was trying to overhear as much of it as she could. From where he sat he could hear nothing but a voice, but probably from her position by the door she could distinguish words. This suspicion so appalled him that, if Belle wanted his silence she could not have been better served. She had never been subtle in her methods, and he soon became convinced that

she was listening, for beyond making a few random remarks about the children, she scarcely opened her mouth while Ernley was away.

After a time she evidently heard him put down the receiver, for she shut the door, and strolled back to the chair she had been sitting in when he went out. Dan sat rigid with embarrassment and misery, and had not succeeded even in forcing out a remark about the weather when Ernley came in.

"Well," said Belle at once, "who was your call from?"

"Barker," said Ernley; "he was ringing me up about that sherry."

"But the shop's closed."

"He rang me up from his home."

"Do you generally call him 'kid'?"

Dan felt his skin go like a goose's, not so much for Ernley possibly snared in a delinquency as for the manner of Belle's snaring. He saw Munk's face grow hard, though he answered quietly:

"I certainly don't call him that."

"But I heard you—you said, 'Don't be silly, kid' and then 'Good night, kid' at the end."

Belle had always been crude in her methods—Dan had been present at many a scene like this in the old days—but it was the first instance he had known since her marriage. Ernley turned crimson and Dan blushed with him and for him.

"You must have good ears," he said, "to hear so distinctly through two shut doors."

"I need 'em in this house."

"Well, I feel this is a matter more interesting to you than to Daniel, who probably doesn't care how I address my wine-merchant. Did you ever go to Barker's, Dan, when you were in business?"

"I dunno. We—we were a tied house, you know," stammered poor Dan.

"For your wines, I mean of course." Ernley seemed

annoyed at his failure to assist in the diversion. "I suppose you stocked wines."

"Yes, we stocked wines in a manner of speaking—sherry and port and such."

Ernley discoursed on port and sherry as he had formerly discoursed on German reparations. But the rest of the evening was sheer agony to Daniel. He knew that Belle was only waiting for him to be gone before she reopened her attack. Her parting lips and heavy brow were an earnest of the storm that would break when she had her husband to herself. She sat silent, huddled and lumpish, her eyes fixed sullenly on Ernley. Sometimes Dan almost felt sorry for Munk when he thought of what he would be put through in the next hour or so. But most often he was angry and not sorry. Ernley had almost certainly not been talking to his wine-merchant, and he richly deserved to be told off. Dan was outraged and disgusted at the idea of his slightest unfaithfulness to Belle. If he made her unhappy through being unsympathetic and tiresome, that was bad enough, but if he distressed her through any treacherous friendship with another woman, he was nothing but a swine.

Ten o'clock struck, and Daniel rose to his feet with muttered excuses. It wouldn't do any good to stop on, so he'd better go and let them get it over. But as he went out he felt sorry and ashamed for them both.

§ 2

Once in the dark and empty street he pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. Whew! That had been dreadful—that glimpse of married life . . . Ernley a philanderer and Belle a shrew. He had suddenly been shown the dark side of both his friendship and his love. Ernley, that companion of so many years had appeared before him as a gross and selfish man, unhappy and yet spoilt by prosperity, thinking of nobody but himself, and already, after barely three years of marriage, fallen into deceit.

Belle, whom, even since his return, he had seen as all maternal kindness, the wanton ripened and sweetened into the mother, he had seen to-night on the level of vulgar jealousy and suspicion, dragged by them below the decencies of common reticence . . . exposing her husband before the man who had once loved her.

He had reached the Parsonage gate, but felt too much shaken to go in at once and face the questions of Mr. Marchbanks and Jess Harman. They would want to know what sort of evening he had spent, and he wasn't yet in a fit mood to tell them. He walked up the lane, which just beyond the Parsonage shrivelled into a cart-track and led under some skew-blown thorn trees to the open down.

As he walked into the great spread loneliness of Heighton Hill, Dan's heart was full of offence because the love-story of Belle Shackford and Ernley Munk had not yet been given its happy ending. He had lost her not to joy but to sorrow. He felt that she was unhappier with the man she had chosen than she would have been with the man who was not her choice. Ernley had not the power to make any woman happy. He was too self-centered, too restless, too exacting. Daniel remembered him as he had been in courtship—that courtship which had been one long series of quarrels and reconciliations. In marriage he was just the same, it had not changed him. But marriage had changed Belle; it had made her a wife, whereas Ernley was still only a lover.

He told himself that she was happy in her children. But he could have given her those . . . and he would not have stood apart from them, contemptuous and fault-finding, as Ernley stood. Ernley would have preferred to be without them; he did not like this change in Belle—he did not really want a wife but a mistress. He wanted his old fires re-kindled—damn him for a silly fool; and since Belle could not do so he was carrying the torch elsewhere.

Dan was always wretched when he hated. The emotion of hate caused him such acute pain that whenever it was raised in him his whole being seemed to concentrate on

putting it down. Now he reminded himself of all Ernley had endured in the war, the experiences that had given him not only the pain of old wounds to harry him, but also had left his mind torn and gashed. Daniel knew how still in dreams Ernley grovelled in the craters of No Man's Land, cowering and sweating till the inevitable crash came which brought both the full horror of the dream and a terrified awakening. Ernley's mind bore old wounds like his body, wounds both of mind and body which Daniel had been spared by his better luck and his duller constitution. You must judge him morally as you judge a cripple physically. . . . And Belle, too, had been very trying. It was maddening to be suspected . . . even if you were guilty. . . . There had been something vulgar and womanish in her method of reproach. . . . But Daniel could not judge Belle, and thoughts of her often brought him back into all his rage at Ernley. It was Ernley's fault that she had behaved in such a low fashion. She had been driven to it by his conduct, by her own desperate efforts to defend her marriage. She was in despair, poor Belle, and had been unable to keep up her disguises. Ernley was not worthy of her big, generous soul; he did not appreciate the graces it had acquired through marriage. Dan thought of her stooping over Thomas Helier with the woolly ball in her hand.

§ 3

It was not till eleven o'clock that he felt calm enough to go back to the Parsonage. Jess Harman flung open the door in a state of high indignation.

"Well, so you're back at last! What'll my auntie think of me not coming home before this? I said I'd be back by ten."

"You needn't have waited."

"I like that! With your poor little baby yelling his head off. A nice father you are—gallivanting half the night and leaving your poor little child at home."

"Well, I couldn't have taken him with me."

"No, but you might have come back at a Christian hour. You really don't deserve to have a baby."

"Now, Jess, you've no call to talk like that."

"Yes, I have. I never heard of such goings on—stopping at the Crown till all hours. It isn't seemly that you should hang round Mrs. Ernley Munk."

Dan flushed.

"So it's taken you that way too, has it?"

"How d'you mean by 'too'?"

"You're getting like Mr. Marchbanks, seeing harm where there ain't none."

"Well if there ain't harm in leaving your poor child and sitting half the night with an old sweetheart. . . ."

"I wasn't sitting with her. I went for a walk."

"That was kind of you, seeing as you know I was waiting for you here."

"Couldn't Mr. Marchbanks have looked after Baby?"

"Him! What's he know about a human child? Go on, Daniel, you've behaved badly and there's no good making out you haven't."

Daniel did not want to make out that he hadn't. He suddenly saw himself as a monster of guilt, neglecting his child while he indulged in his evil passions. "Out of the heart proceed murders, adulteries. . . ." Those were words in the Bible. Out of his heart had proceeded murders and adulteries—up there on the down. Was he the man to judge Belle's shrewishness or Munk's philandering? He said no more, but went sheepishly upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

THE first weeks of the new year were depressing. It was mortal cold on the 'bus. Thomas Helier was cutting his teeth and turned night into day at the Parsonage. Mr. Marchbanks was harassed out of his usual sweet temper by his choir's insistence on singing the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis to Cathedral settings, and Jess Harman was irritable and unfriendly for reasons unknown.

At the back of these minor disturbances lay the thundery conditions at the Crown, giving Daniel a continual sense of little ease. He did not go again to see Ernley and Belle. He kept away unhappily and self-consciously, feeling that he could do no good either by going or by staying away. Curiosity urged him to go, apprehension kept him away. Now and then he met Belle or Ernley in the village, and they exchanged greetings and perhaps a few more meaningless words, but there was no reopening of confidence on Ernie's part, no return of motherly sweetness on Belle's. They were both aware of the insight he had had that night into their home life, and felt shy of him in consequence.

Daniel learned most about them from the young man at the George. The new tenants at the George were going out on Lady Day. Their tenancy had been a failure.

"There ain't room for two pubs in this place," said the young man sadly, "at least not two good-class pubs. The Crown has got all the good-class trade. Of course, I could make the George pay if I was to run it as your father used to run it, but I daren't do that after all the trouble there's been."

"Maybe not. But why don't you go for the sharrybangs?" remembering Ernley's suggestion before the smash.

"Because we ain't in the right position for sharrybangs. We're off the main-road, and we ain't any distance either from Lewes or Newhaven, both of which can give better teas than any one-horse place like this. Nobody's passing us at tea-time except cyclists, and maybe a stray motorist or two. I ain't had anybody in for teas or lunches since October, though I provide both. If anyone comes at all this time of year, they go to the Crown. I'm sick of it."

"Where are you going?"

"I dunno—not settled yet. I've heard of a job in a catering business, but it means a mortal lot of travelling about, and I'm not the man to enjoy being away from my wife."

"Who's coming in here after you?"

"I dunno. Maybe some one out of Hobday & Hitch's. But I'll tell you what I've heard. I've heard as how Munk over there is thinking of buying the George."

"You don't tell me!"

"I do. It's only talking, but I got it from one of Hobday & Hitch's men last time they was here with the ale. They say he's after it, anyway, and when you come to think of it, the two pubs together ud make a fine little place. He could put a sort of covered passage over the road—make it look old-fashioned and all that to match the rest. I heard as he thought of having the tap over here and keeping the Crown for the visitors only."

"I wonder if he'll do it."

"Well, there's no telling. He's a clever sort of man, and ambitious. I believe he'd end up big some day if it wasn't for his marriage."

"You think that ull stop him?"

"Well, a man's missus means a lot to his getting on or his getting out, and by all reports the missus at the Crown is a bit of a trial."

"How d'you know that?"

"I don't know it, but I've heard it. Maudie Harman often

steps across here and has tea with my wife, and she's told us that they have some fine rows now and again. But most likely you know more'n I do, seeing you're friends."

Dan uneasily scraped his foot among the sawdust.

"I don't think there's anything much wrong. She ain't used to hotel life, being a farmer's daughter. But I haven't been near 'em since New Year."

"Well, seemingly she's having a jealous fit now. She's got an idea he's after another girl, Maudie says."

"And ain't he?"

"Maudie doesn't think so. There's a young woman he takes out a bit—one he used to know before his marriage. But Maudie doesn't think there's anything in it."

"How the devil does she know?"

"By his temper. He's always as cross and difficult as he can be, and a man ain't like that when he's just got a new girl."

"It must be jolly over there," sighed Daniel, "her jealous and him contrary."

The young man nodded.

"There's nothing for pulling a man and a woman down like an unhappy marriage. But you and me know that married life has no call to be like that, don't we, Mr. Sheather?"

Daniel and the young man exchanged some opinions and confidences on marriage, a subject on which they were both of the same mind.

§ 2

Early in March a tide set into the affairs of Daniel which definitely altered their course. The start was nothing more exciting than the Downs 'bus company altering their time-table, but this very ordinary piece of spring tactics resulted in their employees' complete uprooting. The first 'bus was scheduled to leave Newhaven at seven instead of nine. Work was starting earlier on the farms and it became necessary for most of the Newhaven-dwelling labourers in the

Ouse Valley to be at their posts by half-past seven at the latest. Therefore, the Downs Company put on an extra 'bus which should run as far as Lewes only, and be back to take up its normal traffic at nine o'clock.

It would be extremely difficult and trying for Dan, who had not yet saved enough money to buy a bicycle, to be in Newhaven by seven. The rest of the Company's employees lived in the town, but this was out of the question for young Sheather, who had to stick to his free lodging at Bullockdean Parsonage if he was still to send half his wages to his mother at Brakey Bottom. He could, of course, apply for transfer to another route. Several 'buses left Lewes in northward and westward directions at fairly reasonable hours, but he realised that his home at Bullockdean put him at a disadvantage even for these, and he was terrified of losing his job by interfering with the conditions of his employment.

The problem was in this state when an unexpected solution of it came from Brakey Bottom itself—through Chris jilting his Mary Wright. The exact reasons for this catastrophe were obscure, but Dan was not altogether surprised. As it happened, Chris was now in a good position to marry. The Squire of Hoddern Place, on the other side of Telscombe, had taken a fancy to him, and had engaged him as chauffeur. He was having him taught to drive his Austin landaulette, Chris having had hitherto only an experimental acquaintance with Fords, and had promised him a good cottage to live in as well as generous wages. There was never a better opportunity for Chris to marry his Mary Wright, but in point of fact his Mary Wright lived on unwed at Exceat, while Chris brought his mother to the comfortable eight-roomed cottage beside the garage at Hoddern gates. Kitty Sheather had won at the last.

Dan felt contemptuous and indignant, but could not fail to realise the blessings of what had happened. His mother would now be provided for, comfortable and happy for life;

there would no longer be any need for Daniel's fifteen shillings a week. He could have them for his own and buy with them the freedom to live where he liked. He decided almost immediately to move into Newhaven. If he did not move, he might lose his job, and once more he was restless to be away from the Crown. There was no need to go across the water this time. Once he was in Newhaven he would not have to dread these occasional evening meetings with Belle, he would not have to hear the village gossip about her and Ernley. His work would fill his days, and his evenings would be devoted to Thomas Helier. He had made up his mind to take the child with him. He could easily find some motherly woman who would take charge of him while he was at work.

He was sorry to be leaving Mr. Marchbanks and the Parsonage, and knew that his services would be missed both in the garden and in the church. But if he stayed on he would have no time, with his new early hours, either for housework or for serving the altar, and if he lost his job he would come once more upon his friend's hands and purse. No, he must clear out. Everything seemed to demand it, and he'd better start at once to find some decent place to go to.

Mr. Marchbanks approved of his decision. He did not say much, but Dan knew he was glad that he was going out of reach of Belle. Young Sheather still thought the Parson's attitude towards this part of the situation narrow and unsympathetic, but he was now half-glad that Mr. Marchbanks felt like this—it would comfort him when the garden-beds were all over groundsel and there couldn't be any service in Bullockdean Church because Freddie Pont had overslept himself. . . .

Neither did Jesse Harman seem to mind his going away—certainly not as much as he would have thought—but in one respect her opposition surprised him. She was indignant at his taking Thomas Helier with him.

"You'd never, Daniel! The poor little thing! You can't

take him to a strange place and then leave him alone all day."

"Well, I can't leave him here."

"Why not? I'd look after him, and take him home along with me at nights. I know Auntie ud let me."

"Thank you, Jess. But I couldn't allow it. He's an unaccountable nuisance here at the Parsonage; it'll make up to Mr. Marchbanks a bit for my going if he don't have the kid yelling at all hours."

"He doesn't yell at all hours. You shouldn't talk so! Poor little mite, he'll die with nobody but you to look after him."

"He won't have nobody but me to look after him. I'll go to a place where they'll undertake it, or maybe put him into a 'creech' while I'm working."

"Why not put him out to baby-farm at once and have done with it—and him too, poor little innocent"—and Jess Harman walked out, tossing her chin.

Emmie, his sister-in-law, took much the same view of the matter. She had begged Dan to let her have the baby at Brakey Bottom. Of course, he knew that Thomas Helier would probably be happier there than in a "creech" or with his father, but there was something at the bottom of Dan's heart which absolutely refused to let him part with him. Whenever he thought of it he seemed to see his Rose Falla looking up at him from her big low bed in Sark, and murmuring with dying lips—"*Notre Helier.*" He must not be unfaithful to that union which he still had with her in the child. In Thomas Helier, Rose was still alive, still able to receive his love and cherishing. She no longer slept under her ilex tree and her white French stone, but lay in his arms and received his kisses. He could not leave her behind in Bullockdean—in another grave.

Moreover, Thomas himself was now an engaging infant, who, if he occasionally yelled in the stresses of bodily development, knew his father and approved of him, signifying the same by various gross noises which were very nearly

words. It would be good to find Thomas Helier to welcome him home at the end of the day, when Bullockdean was five miles up the valley, when both the tavern and the church were strange, and Belle Munk, who was half Belle Shackford, no longer walked in twilight down the street.

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

DANIEL was not long in finding a convenient lodging. He took a room in Greville Row, a small blind row running out of Bridge Street. The houses were mean and slatey, but from his window he had a view through chimneys of the masts of ships. Also, his landlady seemed a pleasant woman, and favourably disposed towards Thomas Helier, which even a brief experience of lodging-hunting told him most landladies were not.

Into these new quarters he moved at the end of March, ready for April's changes. The first evening was one of unparallelled misery. Indoors he missed his company—Jess Harman talking and working, Mr. Marchbanks reading and smoking—and outdoors he missed the clear pure ridges of the downs against the sky, and the low northward horizon where the sky met the Brooks in the midst of the Gate of Lewes. Here he felt cramped and lonely—cramped by the four walls of his room and landscape of masts and chimneys that shut out all but the topmost reaches of the sky—lonely with no company but that of Thomas Helier, who lay in his cot, chewing Belle's woolly ball.

Dan had to give him his bath that night, a task which he had learned to perform, as he performed most feminine tasks, with a fair amount of efficiency. He had just finished and was tying his son into his nightgown, when the landlady came in and was at once overpowered and delighted by such an unwonted exhibition of paternal resource. She invited Dan to come down to supper with her and her husband, and the rest of the evening did not pass so badly.

The landlady's husband kept a small shop down by the harbour and was full of tales of ships and seamen. Dan wondered if he had ever had his father for customer, but was not able to give a clear enough description to stand out of the jumble of the storekeeper's memories.

The next day, after an early breakfast of tea and bread and butter, he was off to his work, leaving Thomas Helier to the care of the landlady till it was time to take him to the "creech," which did not open till nine. This especial "creech" was run by a local welfare committee on highly scientific and hygienic principles. When Dan called for his offspring at six o'clock, he found him in an unwonted atmosphere of fresh air and pine-tar soap. His clothing had obviously been put in a steriliser, and on the whole he seemed almost too antiseptic to handle with a pair of work-worn hands, not innocent of car-oil. But the matron and her assistant were both exceedingly cordial and kind. Dan was a relief to them in their day of inefficient yet obstinate mothers, stuffed with worn-out maxims and old-wives tales. They gave him a feeding-chart for Thomas Helier and all sorts of practical and intimate information. They told him that he was just the proper weight for his age and much better looked-after than many a baby who came to them from a mother's care. He went off glowing with pride, while Thomas, full of good cheer, pulled off his father's cap half a dozen times on the way home and threw it on the pavement, thus providing him with introductions to any number of women he had cared to know.

After that first day he was not so lonely. His work filled up ten hours and his early rising made him want to go early to bed. He had supper every night with his landlady and her husband, while his Sundays and his Wednesday afternoon were mostly spent at Hoddern with his mother though he still paid occasional visits to Brakey Bottom.

Kitty Sheather was exulting in her new cottage, so well-built, trim and neat. All day long she swept and dusted and polished and washed and cooked for Chris, who came home

in the evening, and sometimes to midday dinner, looking handsomer than ever in his chauffeur's uniform. He was happy in his new work, which involved little more than driving, as his master had two cars, an Austin two-seater, and a big Austin landaulette. There was a boy to do the washing and polishing, and for anything substantial in the way of adjustments or repairs the cars went to a garage in Newhaven. Daniel's craving to punch his brother's head was often almost physically painful. There was something cheeky and self-confident about Chris's whole demeanour which simply cried out to be hit. It said: "Look at me. Here I am, keeping my mother in comfort. She's better off with me now than she's ever been in her life. I've got a good job and I've done well by myself and her too. Look at you. You do nothing for her now, and never did much. If she'd only had you to depend on she'd still be living at Brakey Bottom, grudged and grumbled at by Len. You've got a rotten job, and can barely keep yourself and your kid."

Dan found it very hard not to quarrel with Chris, but he knew that it would do no good, as Kitty would immediately take her darling's part and encourage him still further in his satisfaction. Besides, hang it all, Chris was right. He *had* done well for his mother, as well as for himself, and he loved her as few sons loved their mothers. Dan had not done well for his mother, and though he knew in his heart that he loved her as much as Chris did, he had not been able to make her see it, and possibly never would.

Of Bullockdean during this time he saw nothing, beyond its distant cluster of houses from the Lewes road. Once or twice Mr. Marchbanks came to see him in Newhaven, and they sometimes went to the pictures together on Wednesday afternoons. On other Wednesdays, Jess Harman would come in and go to the pictures with him, but neither she nor Mr. Marchbanks ever gave him any news of Belle. Perhaps they would if he had asked, but he never did.

CHAPTER EIGHT

§ 1

ONE afternoon in May, when the first heat of the summer was in the air and in the dust that whirled in a brown cloud behind the afternoon 'bus, a rather fuddled-looking sailor man hailed the driver on the outskirts of Newhaven. Dan was punching tickets in the front seats, and took no notice beyond pulling the bell-cord when the new passenger had collapsed creakingly in his seat at the back. It was not till he came to take his ticket that he recognised him. For fully a quarter of a mile of the Lewes road Tom Sheather and his son gazed and gazed into each other's face.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Daniel at last.

"Dan, is it you?" moaned his father.

"Of course, it is. Who did you think it was?"

"I thought you were in Sark with your mother's people, and I've had a drop to drink. . . . Anyway, I can't make out what you're doing here."

"Earning my living," said Dan gruffly, and pulled the bell for a non-stop at Piddinghoe. "Did you think that when you cleared out and left us all, I'd keep away, even if I'd wanted to, which I didn't? I had to come back and look after mother when you deserted her."

"She was all right," murmured Tom sheepishly. "I knew as Chris and Len ud look after her, even if you didn't. And to tell you the truth, Daniel, between one man and another, the way she took on after the smash was something awful. Her tongue. . . .my Lord. . . .enough to have driven me into the deep-sea trade. But I've only been coasting—a Geordie, you know—what brings the coals to Newcastle—from Newcastle, I should say."

"And is this the first time you've come ashore?"

"Lord, no! I've seen a lot of the world since I've been here last—Cardiff, Newcastle, Middlesborough—first-class places:

> "First the Dugeon, then the Spurn,
> Flamborough Head comes next in turn.
> Then when Whitby's low light I see,
> North by west my course will be."

This burst of song rang through the 'bus, making even the driver turn round on his seat. Dan was covered with confusion.

"Come, Father, adone do. There's no need to let everyone know as you're tight."

"Tight! I ain't tight. I've had a drop of drink, as who wouldn't, having to face what I've got to face. I'm going to face that tongue. I've had to do with some first-class tongues since I took up with the Geordie trade. But never met one like hers. I never meant to go, but I promised the old man I would. Our old man's a good old man—a good old Bible-reading man, and he says to me, 'Sheather,' he says, 'a husband and wife are one flesh.' Then I had a row with the Donkeyman off Dungeness. He says to me: 'What did you do in the Great War? I got a medal!' I don't believe it. You can buy 'em second-hand. You never got a medal, did you, Daniel?"

"How long are you ashore for?" asked his son severely.

"For ever and ever and ever and ever," trolled Tom, "world without end, 'aymen. That's why I'm going to see your mother."

"Aren't you never going to sea again?"

"Not till the old *Alfred Bateson's* gone out of harbour. I won't go sailing any more with a son of a bitch like that Donkeyman. And there was others in the foc'sle too. . . . I'm the mate, and I won't take sauce from nobody, not even from the skipper."

"You mean as you've run off the sea same as you run off the land?"

"No, I didn't run off. I was paid off. I've got lots of money," jingling his pockets. "I'm going to see my wife and children. I'm glad to see you, old Daniel. Fancy meeting you on a 'bus. 'Ticket, please' you says to me, as cool as anything."

"Well, here's your ticket to Telscombe Throws. That's where you get out, and it's fourpence."

"You mean to say you're going to ask your own father to pay for his ticket on your 'bus."

"It ain't my 'bus. I'm only the conductor—thirty bob a week."

"Why?"

"To earn my living, as I've told you before."

"You needn't be so sharp with me, Dan. You've got a tongue like a saw. You're getting too like your mother for comfort."

"I don't see as you've a right to expect anything but straight talk after the way you've treated us. You land us all in a mess, and then clear out and leave us there."

"Surelye you ain't going to cast that up at me now."

"Surelye I am. Now, Father, this is where you get out. Mother's not at Telscombe now, you know. She's at Hoddern, with Chris."

"Hoddern—what for?"

"Chris has got a job as shuvver to Mr. Williamson, and Mother lives along of him. Don't forget to turn off the Telscombe road at Bullock Down."

"I don't think I'm going," said Tom suddenly.

"Of course, you're going."

"I ain't—I'm scared. She'll have my skin off. I won't go unless you come with me, Dan."

"Come with you and leave my 'bus! Do talk sense."

"Well, I ain't getting off."

"Yes, you are. I'll put you off if you won't go."

"You're an undutiful son—that's what you are," moaned Tom Sheather as the 'bus drew to a standstill in response to Dan's ring. "The Bible says 'Honour your father and

mother.' I've seen it written, and they say it in church too at the Ten Commandments."

"Well, I'd honour you fast enough if you'd give me a chance. But you took this 'bus to go and see Mother, and see her you shall whatever happens."

"You don't know as I'll go there even now you have put me off."

"Of course, you'll go there. Now, please leave hold of that rail, Father. We want to get on."

"I don't know as I can stand without it. I don't think any shakes of your 'bus, Daniel; it's making everything go round and round. I feel worse than off Flamborough Head."

"That's your own fault," said Dan unsympathetically. "Nothing to do with the 'bus. Now, Father, adone do and go off, or you'll get me into trouble."

"I want to see you again."

"So you shall. I'll call at Hoddern to-morrow. It's my afternoon off. Good-bye."

He rang the bell and the 'bus went grinding away on its bottom gear, leaving Tom Sheather pathetically planted at the Throws, knowing that the worst was still before him.

§ 2

When Daniel came back that way at half-past five he was horrified to see his father apparently still standing where he had left him. But he looked different somehow. He was sober for one thing, and badly cowed. He held up a melancholy hand to stop the 'bus.

"What, you still here?" greeted Daniel.

"I've been," said his father ruefully, "and I've come back."

He collapsed on the nearest seat.

"She wouldn't have me. She threw me out. She said I was good-for-nothing—'vagabond' was her word—she'd never look at me again. That wretched boy of hers told me

the same. Dressed as a shuvver he was—in a uniform with buttons, like yours, but a sight better than yours. He'd no call to speak to me so, seeing as I'm his father. He told me I'd dished the family and then left them."

Chris's reproach seemed, to Daniel, to have about it the ring of truth. But during the last two hours his anger had cooled, and by now it had evaporated. He was sorry for his father, guessing what his rout at Hoddern had been like; also he had in all honesty to confess that Kitty Sheather had probably given him a terrible time before he actually went off. It was almost certainly true that she had her own tongue to blame for her desertion. Not that there was any real excuse for his Dad, he told himself severely, but there were certainly extenuating circumstances, and he could not help being sorry for him in this miscarriage of his reconciliation. Also, he'd been told what a tick he was quite often enough.

The front part of the 'bus was full, with human cargo for the Newhaven cinemas, but the back seats were empty enough for Dan to sit down for a few minutes beside his father.

"Cheer up, Dad. I'm sorry Mum won't have you, but of course she thinks of nothing but Chris these days. He was most things to her before, but now you've gone he's everything. I'm nothing, neither. We're outside together again, us two."

"Then you haven't turned against me, Dan?"

"Not I. I won't say that you've behaved otherways than as a mean, low-down, wicked, unnatural cad, and that you haven't asked for all you've got, but I can guess what drove you to it, and reckon I'm your son and ull stick by you."

"Same as you always did," beamed Tom Sheather. "You remember how it was always me and you against Chris and your mother?"

"Yes," said Dan, and sighed. He still hankered for a different alliance, but it was not the same hankering as of

old. He had tacitly come to accept his mother's remoteness. Besides, he now had his son.

"Did you know I'd got a baby, Father?"

"Yes, over in Sark."

"No, at Newhaven. I brought him home with me. I'd never leave him with that lot at the Pêche à Agneau—savages they were, just a lot of ignorant foreign savages."

"Your mother's stock," said Tom vindictively.

"Well, reckon it's where Mum gets some of her hard ways from. But we mustn't miscall her. Now, Dad, where are you getting out in Newhaven? I haven't taken your ticket yet."

"Reckon I'll go to the terminus. I never took a room when I landed, thinking I'd stop along of your mother. Where's your little place, Daniel?"

"In Greville Row—close to the Bridge. I've only got a bedroom and there ain't room for two. But maybe the landlady ud let you have a bed in the house."

"That ud suit me fine, till I go to sea again. I'd have gone anyhow, for it's a better life than on land, but now reckon I'll go quicker. If you'll let me stay along of you, Dan, I'll be unaccountable obliged. I've got plenty of cash, and I can be looking round for a ship. There's nothing like being able to pick your job."

"No doubt," said Daniel, as he pulled the bell for an old woman who wanted to get off at the Brighton Road.

§ 3

When the day's work was over, the 'bus in the garage and Dan's returns in the office, he took his parent to Greville Row with a view to finding him accommodation. On their way they called for Thomas Helier at the "creech" and Tom Sheather had his first meeting with his grandson.

The child was looking his best. Six weeks of the most modern and efficient care had greatly improved both his

health and appearance. His teething troubles were over, he could walk a few steps, and wholesome food and fresh air had made him merry and friendly. Tom Sheather was delighted with him.

"My Lord! Ain't he just about splendid! Did you ever see such a boy! Brown eyes, too, like yourn, but I guess he doesn't take after his grandma's family—and you've called him Thomas, after me. Reckon you don't think so small of your poor old dad after all."

"He was christened before you did your bunk," said Dan truthfully.

They walked home together, Tom carrying the baby in such a manner that he could—and did—snatch off both their caps. Their laughter went before them up the street and prepared their welcome in Greville Row. Dan already had a place in his landlady's heart. His forlorn condition, the appealing youth of his widowhood and fatherhood, had stirred up her maternal feelings toward him. Besides, he was uncommonly handy, for a man, about the house. He had helped her many times at the end of a heavy day—once even cooking the supper for her, when she had a headache and did not like stooping over the fire. She was glad to see his father and readily promised him a bed. If he didn't mind the top attic, there was a bed in that, and she could easily fix him up a wash-bowl and some hooks.

So three generations of Sheathers took up their abode under Mrs. Gain's roof—not highly successful or creditable Sheathers, but comfortable none the less. It was Tom now who took his grandson every morning to the "creech." Dan having wisely determined that he was not a fit person to have charge of the child all day. In the evening he met his son at the Downs Company's office, and they brought Thomas Helier home together. The evening was spent with the Gains, first at supper and afterwards in the parlour, where there was a gramophone, which reminded Dan, sometimes uncomfortably, of old days at Batchelors' Hall.

Mr. Gain and Tom Sheather had a great deal in common,

and told each other over their pipes endless tales of seaports and the sea. Dan noticed a change in his father. He seemed much younger, and even more irresponsible than in the days of the George. Some of the adventures he recounted were simply the pranks of schoolboys.

His head was full of the sea. Though it was barely a year since he had signed on his first ship after twenty-five years on land, the sea was now his world, and the land forgotten. The vicissitudes of the George did not move him, even when at midsummer its amalgamation with the Crown passed from conjecture into deed. The two inns were to be run as one hotel—"The George & Crown"—with a passage-bridge across the road, from which the sign should swing. Dan was rather stirred and distressed by this new change, but Tom Sheather seemed to regard it merely as a joke.

"He'll have bought the Ritz some day, that Ernley Munk. Who'd have thought he'd turn out such a bloody old hotelkeeper—him with his books and his talk and his wenches? D'you remember that gal in black he brought over to supper with us?—and then went and married your poor Belle Shackford? I wonder how she likes all this glory."

"Reckon she likes it well enough—why shouldn't she?"

"Never said she shouldn't. Clean contrary. I bet she likes spending his money on clothes. She was always a gal after clothes for her back, though she might have shown less of her back when she'd got 'em on. I never saw that gal without a hook undone."

Dan found his father's reminiscences painful, and changed the subject.

"Have you heard of another berth yet?"

"I've heard of several, but they won't do. I tell you this time I'm going to pick my job. I was mate on the *Alfred Bateson,* A. B. on the *Yorkshire Crown* and *Rose Rebecca.* I've a long sea-faring experience, seeing I was in the coasting trade before many of these lads were born. My Lord! I'm glad I went back to the sea. There ain't no good job

on land, except for Christopher Sheather. You've got a rotton job, Daniel. Why don't you chuck it and come along with me on my next voyage?"

"What should I do on a ship? I know nothing about the sea."

"Weren't you a Sarkie fisherman for two years?"

"Yes, but that was only motor-boats."

"Well, even they ud teach you something. I never saw a wickeder coast than the coast of Sark—changing every hour, and some of those rocks not down on the chart at all. Know that rock under the Grande Moie?—forget what it's called, but it wasn't on the chart."

"I never did much navigation over there, they wouldn't let me. And anyways it ud be very different on a Geordie."

"But you'd soon learn. You're young and smart, and it's a grand life."

"Well, there's no use talking. I've got a kid to look after."

"You could leave him with Mr. and Mrs. Gain. Or Emmie ud take him at Brakey Bottom and be delighted. You'd be able to pay handsome for his keep, for you'd be making good money—a sight more than you make here, and not so much chance of spending it."

Dan shook his head.

"There's no good talking. I can't leave the kid—and I'm not so badly off on this job, neither. It might lead to something better."

"What?" asked Tom Sheather cruelly.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

AUGUST came. Newhaven harbour was noisy with cross-channel traffic, and the Downs Company 'buses were crowded on all journeys with the shifting, summer traffic of the roads. The weather was very hot, and Daniel often came home of an evening limp and weary. It was hard work conducting a crowded 'bus on a hot day, with panting, sweating human beings clambering over him and clamouring at him, and a cloud of dust whirling along continually over the back step, on which he stood jarred and listless through the long hours of the lanes.

He grew so tired and out-of-sorts that on his free days he gave up his regular appearances at Hoddern. By giving a refuge to his father he had only added to his unpopularity with his mother and Chris. They showed him plainly that they thought him disloyal, and sometimes, apart from this, sitting with them at their table, he was pricked with envy. For the first time he became dispirited at the contrast between himself and Chris. There they sat opposite each other, each side of their mother. Both were in uniform and both were their mother's sons. But Chris's uniform was a smart summer rig-out of cream-coloured dust-cloth faced with blue, while Dan's was his old winter uniform of green and shiny serge, patched with leather and smelling of car-oil. And if they wore mufti it was the same contrast—Chris in grey flannels and a silk shirt, looking the gentleman every bit of him except his shoes, whose failure to reach that standard was veiled from Daniel by his ignorance; while Dan's ordinary suit was even more disreputable-looking than his uniform, because it was older, and had become too tight for

him while he was in Sark. Then to crown all, Chris was his mother's darling, loved and approved by her, while Dan his mother disapproved of and reproached—"You cannot love me, or you would not live with that vagabond man who deserted me."

So on those hot August Wednesday and Sunday afternoons he no longer trekked up the Lewes road, but sat with Thomas Helier on the beach, watching the peacock sea grow pink against the sky, or sometimes he had what his landlady called "a good lay down" on the sofa in her sitting-room. Mrs. Gain had by this time given him the freedom of her house, including the sitting-room with its tapestried suite, central table, and permanently half-drawn blind. She was proud that he should use it, feeling sure that it was "better than anything he was accustomed to," and certainly nothing quite like it had existed in any of Dan's various homes—the George, Moie Fano, the Pêche à Agneau, or Bullockdean Parsonage.

One particular Wednesday afternoon, Tom Sheather had taken out the baby, and Dan lay asleep on the little hard green sofa, lulled by the drone of a bee under the blind. He looked particularly helpless and childish, huddled there in his shirt sleeves, his hair rubbed out of its sleekness by the tapestried cushion, his cheeks flushed by his sleep. Mrs. Gain hesitated in a tender moment before she woke him, holding out his coat for him to put on.

"Wa'r is it?" he mumbled drowsily.

"A lady to see you, Mr. Sheather. I thought I'd better bring you your coat?"

"Where?"

"I put her into the kitchen while I went to rouse you."

"Who is she?"

"I think she said her name was Munk."

Dan sat up, blinking and terribly awake. His thought was: "I won't see Belle. I won't have her in here. I've kept away from her for six months and I won't have her

spoil it all by coming. Show her out." His words actually were, "Please show her in."

In came Belle, carrying the spoils of her morning's shopping in Newhaven. She wore a dress of flowered voile, tumbled with the heat, and under her big straw hat her hair showed yellow as straw.

"Hullo, Belle," said Daniel awkwardly. "How nice of you to call. I haven't seen you for ages."

"Hullo, Daniel," said Belle languidly, and began to cry. The bee droned on under the blind.

§ 2

For nearly a minute Dan stood and gazed at her. At first he thought that he must be still asleep and dreaming—this was like so many of his dreams—Belle standing before him in her tumbled loveliness, tormenting his heart with her sorrow and his love. Then he discovered that he was trembling all over.

"Belle—what is it?. . . .what's happened?"

"You know," sobbed Belle. "You know."

"I don't know. I only guess. . . .a dunnamany things. Belle, sit down and tell me all about it."

She sank down on one of the tapestried armchairs, and he sat down on the sofa, purposely setting the width of the little centre table between them. The aspidistra in the middle of it partly hid her from him, screening her bowed head and dipping hat with its streaky leaves, disguising the heaving movements of her shoulders. If he had seen her without this barrier, he would have taken her in his arms.

"What is it, dear Belle. Tell me. . . .is it Ernley?"

"Yes—yes. Oh, Dan, I must talk to somebody about him . . . .and you know something already—you must. . . . that time you came to supper and Ernley telephoned.". . .

"You thought he was speaking to a girl."

"Thought?. . . .I knew. He's had a girl for months.

He's been going out with that Pearl Jenner, the one he took up with when I was engaged to you. Oh, I thought that when I'd married him, it would all be settled and happy, as I wanted it to be. I thought I need never be anxious or jealous any more. But now. . . .now. . . ."

Her voice choked away in sobs.

"Why do you tell me all this?" asked Dan stiffly. The yearning and agitation of his heart made him seek desperately a manner that was cold.

"Why? Because you loved me once—you love me still—and you ran away from me in my hour of need, because you were frightened."

"Belle!"

"Well, didn't you?"

His face was scarlet. His coming to Newhaven had always seemed to him as much a renunciation as a refuge, and he was shocked to find that Belle saw it with so different eyes.

"I—I left Bullockdean," he stammered—"I left Bullockdean because I was so miserable. It hurt me to see you and Ernley quarrelling and suspecting each other like that, and I'd no idea as you liked having me by."

" 'No idea!' You're a fool, Daniel. Can't you imagine what a difference it made, having someone that cared? . . . .even though we never talked about it. You took fright that evening and cleared out—or else heaven knows the comfort you might have been."

Though he felt at the back of his mind that, in spite of all she said, he had been right, Daniel still wore the colour of shame. It seemed a terrible thing to have deserted Belle—and yet, God knew. . . .He tried to make amends.

"I'd never have gone if I'd thought for a moment you wanted me to stay. But you never showed me. . . .you never seemed to want me about. If I'd known I'd have stayed. Is it too late? Can't I help at all now?"

She stood up and with a desponding sweep of her arm, pulled off her hat and dropped it on the table.

"I dunno. You can't come back. Maybe I was wrong in blaming you. But I was mad this morning. Just as I came away he got a post-card from her. It said 'Tivoli Palace entrance at 2.30 P.,' and he had told me he was going to Eastbourne about the new furniture."

"You read his post-card?"

"Of course I did. Don't be a prig, Daniel. Who wouldn't read a post-card addressed to her husband?"

"Well, it seems to me she couldn't have meant any harm, or she wouldn't have sent a post-card."

"That shows how little you know. She does that sort of thing to humiliate me, to show her power. She knows that I know. She made him bring her around the other day in the side-car of his motor-bike. God! I could scratch her face."

She had come round the table and stood with her arms akimbo, looking down on Daniel. She was big and glowing and angry. She made him think of peonies and sunflowers. He longed to have the aspidistra once more between them, but instead she stood between him and it, hiding its dessicated respectability with her big opulent body. The sunshine poured over her flowered gown, but her head was in the shadow of the drawn blind.

"Oh, God, what I've endured all these months! I can't bear it any longer. It's—worse—worse than before we married. I ought never to have married him. I ought to have married you, though you are such a dummy. You wouldn't have made me unhappy like this."

Belle Munk, the mother of Jill and Peter, the friend of Thomas Helier, was gone, and in her place stood the old Belle Shackford, who ran after men, who scratched women's faces. As he gazed up into her restless, tragic eyes, her marriage seemed to have ended, to have dropped from her. She and Ernley were what they had been before it—jealous, quarrelling lovers, he running after Pearl Jenner, she turning to Daniel Sheather. He saw his past coming back to him in all its sorrow and joy and power. He felt it beating

in his heart, and his eyes were dim with its gathering tears. Half-blind and silly, he sprang to his feet, and threw his arms about her, feeling once more the thrill of her glorious size and strength. She trembled, yielded, as her flushed, angry mouth met his, the rent in the years was knit up, and another home and another woman no longer stood between this and their last embrace. Indeed, the kiss with which he kissed her now was their parting kiss of three and a half years ago, still uniting them in its pain and sweetness. They had never drawn apart. Through all the years their lips had been together, even when she lived in his memory as a shadow on glass.

There was a knock at the door, and they separated. The aspidistra stood once more between them when Mrs. Gain came in.

"I was wondering if the lady ud like a cup of tea, Mr. Sheather. The kettle's just boiling, and it's nearly four o'clock."

"No, thank you very much," said Belle, coughing a little. "I must be getting back now."

"I shouldn't be a minute getting it."

"No thank you. I must catch the four-thirty train."

She put on her hat, picked up her parcels and walked to the door. On the threshold, she remembered herself, and turned round and shook hands with Daniel as he stood gaping at her.

§ 3

For days afterwards Daniel was shaken by this interview. It bewildered him. He did not know what to make of it, either on Belle's side or his own. He was terrified to think that his old passion for her had revived, though, now that he no longer held her in his arms, it did not appear quite as it used in the old days. It was more physical, less romantic and adoring; marriage had changed his attitude somehow. Though that kiss had seemed in unbroken continuity with the past, his love for her was not. It was no longer so very

much more than his kiss. It no longer filled his eyes, satisfying and blinding him. Moreover, he had no illusions about her love for him. It seemed to him quite plain that she had sought him out only to avenge herself on Ernley. She was desperately jealous, as she had always been. She had married to give herself security, and marriage had failed her. So she had turned to Daniel to show herself, and perhaps Ernley, that she did not care, and that where she was betrayed she could betray also.

The more he thought it over, the more he felt that most likely she had no real grounds for jealousy. Ernley was only flirting, fooling around, and if she did not goad him too much would probably soon get over his infatuation. Three years ago Pearl Jenner had been only a blind and a consolation: probably she was still no more. Ernley was disappointed in his marriage too, and was trying to alter its conditions. He had certainly succeeded in diverting Belle's attention from her children to her husband, but beyond that the matter had not prospered. She was not the woman to be roused by such means—Ernley was a fool; and he was not the man to be shaped by such handling—Belle was a fool, too.

This was sometimes Dan's view of the situation—at others he was lost, groping in his love for Belle, overcome with horror at the idea of having deserted her in her hour of need. He vowed that he would stand at her service now, and waited day after day to see if she would claim him. But two weeks passed and nothing happened. She neither wrote nor came. Her visit on that hot August afternoon began to appear more and more in the light of a caprice—the result of a sudden goading. She had repented, and was ashamed. He told himself that he ought to be ashamed too. She did not belong to him, she belonged to his best friend, whom she had taken for better, for worse, not knowing how much better or how much worse it would be.

Marriage was a queer thing, thought Daniel during those days. There seemed so many different kinds of marriage, and

you never knew which kind yours was going to be. He had married without love, out of pity only, and the force of circumstances, and yet his year of marriage was (he already knew) his life's eternal treasure. Ernley and Belle had married out of a passionate and romantic love, which had plucked them up by the roots and flung them together like trees in a hurricane. And look at them now—tossed and distressed, united and yet disunited, lovers and enemies . . . . Look at his father and mother too. His father had loved his mother and had wooed her in the teeth of difficulty, while his mother had faced the anger of her kinsfolk to marry the stranger. To-day they lived apart, and yet contented—his mother's love given to her son, his father's to the sea. They had forgotten their wooing and their love and the blue and golden days of the isles. . . .

CHAPTER TEN

FOR some time Dan had gathered that his father's stay ashore was conditioned by the time his money lasted. More than once he could have gone out on a coaster, but he preferred to remain on land, spending what he had. He went a great deal to the port taverns, but since that first afternoon Dan had never seen him drunk. He liked the society of other sailormen ashore, and often brought a couple with him to spend the evening at Greville Row, to the friendly delight of Mr. Gain.

He still talked a great deal about Dan's joining him at sea. He disliked his son's work on the 'bus, and it made him angry to think of him at a disadvantage when compared with Christopher. He insisted that Thomas Helier should not stand as a barrier between his father and a new life.

"There's three sets of people as I know ud look after him—Mr. and Mrs. Gain here, your sister-in-law Emmie, or that Harman girl. There's no use pretending you're such an extra-special father that he'd miss you at his age. It ain't as if you were going on long voyages. You'd be seeing him every now and again. He wouldn't forget you like some."

Dan shook his head.

"It isn't only him. What should I do on board ship? I don't see myself as an A. B."

"You could come along as cook. My Lord, Dan! But you cook better than any of the sons of Germans we had on the *Yorkshire Crown* or on the *Rebecca Rose*. A good cook is everybody's friend; you'd have a first-class time in the galley."

Dan was touched by his father's anxiety to have him with him, but he would not even discuss the matter. The land held him, though he knew not quite by what claims.

At the end of August, Tom Sheather went off for a week to see a pal at Middlesborough. This man had been skipper of the Geordie which Tom had first sailed in. He was now skipper of the *White King* which had put into Middlesborough for repairs, and he invited Tom to come and spend a few days with him and his wife, who let lodgings in the town.

Dan missed his father, who had always been good company, and had filled up with talk and tales many hours that might have been disturbing if spent alone. Now he had to spend his free time as best he could, and became a devoted father to Thomas Helier, whom he took to the beach on Wednesday afternoons. Here he would lie dozing in the sunshine that warmed the shingle and danced on the little waves that the breeze whipped up on the languid August tide. Thomas Helier sometimes slept in a shawl, sometimes lay lively and garrulous, expressing his approval of the sunshine and the sea. He had a little spade, which he used at his tender age for purposes of destruction rather than construction, and with which he would beat his father when he was too drowsy for good company. He would sprawl over him, too, tugging at his hair, and pulling the carefully brushed and oiled forelock into disarray—"Dadda, wake up," he would cry, "lady."

His infant experience was full of ladies who had befriended him and Daniel in moments of difficulty or embarrassment. He could not think that one would ever pass without stopping to speak to them, or to put on the sock and shoe he had kicked off, or to pick up his woolly ball which had rolled away. "Lady!" he shrieked and welcomed, and Dan continued his encounters with motherly minded females whose efficient sentiment ran over at the sight of the young father and his son.

But in the evening hours, when Thomas Helier was put to bed by all the rules of the Babies' Welfare, there could be no society either of baby or ladies on the beach. Dan could not bear the stuffiness of the Gains' sitting-room, for the

August evening was not yet dark, and he would feel drawn into the twilight, into the streets that still moved with life. Newhaven was not like Lewes after dusk—there was none of the evening coma of the market town, when the beasts have been driven home, and the Fords and gigs are away, and in the public-house sits only the auctioneer, resting after his raucous day. Newhaven streets were full of seamen, from the Geordies and other coasters, sometimes among them strangers from the Baltic or the northwest coast of France. The cinemas and the public-houses were full of them and their girls, and the pavements echoed with their tread, and the dusk was hoarse with the murmur of their voices and stinking with the smell of their pipes.

Dan went most often to the Bridge. Here he would stand and look down into the basin of the Ouse, spreading towards Sleepers Hole. The masts of the ships stood like the lances of a great army between him and the pink edge of the sky. Among them he could see the smoke-stacks—red, and yellow, black and white—and here and there the powerful lines of a crane. There were the ships that went up and down the Channel, and across it to the French ports or to the Norman isles he knew so well,—or turned the Lizard, or wandered up past Deal and Chatham and the flat isles of Kent into the London River. Leaning there on the bridge he would brood over all that his father had told him of the strange country of the sea—of the life on board the ships, with its gaiety and its quarrelling and its cleanliness, of the expanse which he knew only as the Channel, but which to his father was a charted country of roads and names like the country of the downs—Elphick's Tree, and Kinsman's Nab, and the Horse of Willingdon, and the sea-downs of Le Colbert and Le Varne right out towards France, with Les Ridens, or Boulogne Middle.

Sometimes as he looked towards the lances of the coaster-army, he felt that he too would like to go with them out to the new country of the English seas, leaving behind him the land that was so unfriendly, with all its perplexities and

cares. The ghost of Belle Shackford would not come out to him walking upon the water. He still felt that he could not leave his son, or break any of the ties that held him to land, but for the first time he had heard the sea call.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

§ 1

SUDDENLY the tranquility of those days was broken by the summons that all along he had expected. Belle sent him a telegram: "Meet me outside Ship Hotel two-thirty to-morrow." The arrival of a telegram was itself startling in Greville Row, and in a moment of weakness he lied and said it was from his father. He had actually had a letter from his father that morning, telling him that his pal Gregory had offered him a berth as mate on the *White King,* and would take on Dan as cook if he cared to think it over. He foisted the main contents of the letter on to the telegram and the deed was done.

"There now!" cried Mrs. Gain, "I was sure he'd be going to sea again soon. Will he come back here first?"

"I dunno," said Daniel; "maybe he will, for the *White King* ain't ready to sail for a fortnight or so, and he'll want to say good-bye to me and the kid."

"Then you ain't going with him?"

Dan shook his head.

"That's right," cried the landlady; "you stop ashore. I've never yet believed that the sea is anything like half what they crack it up to be."

Dan smiled wanly, and spent the rest of the evening in restless conjecture. Why was Belle throwing herself upon him now? What did she mean by her telegram?—just a meeting? or some confidence or some service? or plans altogether more sweeping and more desperate? He lay awake most of the night, and the next morning lounged, tired and inefficient at the back of his 'bus, his mind no longer asking questions, or pricking itself to meet the future, but lumpish

and inert, adapting itself to circumstances as mud adapts itself to the crushing of wagon-wheels.

But at half-past two he was outside the Ship, in appearance like any other of the young men lounging around on this early-closing day—the country-town mixture of spruceness and stolidity, blue reach-me-down, grey felt hat, and rather regretable mauve socks. The next minute Belle appeared, big, golden, lovely, dropping with the heat that struck down from the hard blue sky and up from the hard, white pavement. She climbed off the Lewes 'bus, holding a suitcase in her hand.

"Hullo, Dan! I'm glad you've come."

"Of course, I've come."

He took the case from her. It was heavy.

"What are you going to do with this?"

"Oh, leave it somewhere—anywhere—wherever I stay. I've left Ernley."

Daniel stared at her, and the colour climbed as usual up his neck and face. He wished Belle would not spring these things on him in the public street.

"I've left him," she repeated, taking off her long cotton gloves. "I couldn't stand any more of it, and when it came to his stopping out all night. . . ."

"He did that?"

"Yes—he's done it twice. And he's going to do it again to-night. Once his motor-bike broke down at Hassocks and he couldn't get away till morning. Convenient—a motor-bike. Another time he went up to London to the Licensed Victuallers' dinner, and now he's gone to the Rotary dinner at Hastings."

It all sounded pretty harmless, but Daniel knew what it meant to Belle, and was not entirely without his own suspicions, which, however, he would not betray.

"You don't know that it means he's with her—Pearl Jenner."

"I do know. I've seen her letters."

Daniel looked worried.

"Yes, I dare say you think I'm low, but I've been driven to it. Her letters kept on coming, so I steamed one open and she'd been in town with him. He hadn't gone to the dinner at all, he'd gone to a theatre. Oh, of course, she didn't say he'd actually slept with her——" Dan looked round in alarm at the lounging young men and dispersing contents of the 'bus, but Belle's warm husky voice had more fierceness than carrying power—it filled his ears but reached nobody else's.

"Of course, she didn't," she continued, "she wouldn't—and there's no need. When he told me he was going to Hastings to-night I told him straight that he was meeting her there—and he didn't deny it. We had a scene together then. And he went off—and I telegraphed to you. Oh, Dan, I know I'm low and bad, but he's driven me to it. I have to know what he's doing, or I'd go mad—and when I do know . . ."

The tears sprang up in her eyes, and he felt them in his own. He could not speak. He merely snatched up her bag from the pavement and carried it into the inn.

"We'll get rid of this, and then we'll go somewhere and talk. Don't cry, Belle, I'll look after you."

But she was not so easily disposed of. The Ship was full; it had no room for her, and they were driven out once more into the street. He was perplexed as to what they should do. He could, of course, take her down to the harbour and find accommodation in the London and Paris Hotel, but Belle protested:

"I don't want to go right away from you like that. Besides, we've neither of us got the money. Can't I get a cheap room near you? Isn't there one in the house where you live?"

"There's the one Dad had, but there's some of his tackle still in it. All the same . . ."

"That won't matter. It'll only be for a night or two. I can't stay here."

He did not speak. The future seemed to rise before him like a dark and terrible wall.

§ 2

Belle's luggage, which after a furlong of hot pavements seemed to have doubled its weight at the end of his arm, was finally left in Tom Sheather's attic. Mrs. Gain had no objection, when her visitor assured her that she did not expect these luxuries of accommodation which the landlady's experience taught her were always a source of trouble with females.

"I've done for nobody but gentlemen for the last ten years. Howsumever, Ma'am, you're welcome to the room for a night or two, if you can put with it."

She thought that her lodger looked fagged, and offered her a cup of tea in the sitting-room, which Dan accepted for her. He wanted to talk to Belle in quiet, out of the streets, though he knew now that the aspidistra and the half-drawn blind no longer afforded the protections he had relied on.

They sat down, as before, each side of the centre table, but this time she was on the sofa, and he sat on the chair under the window, the sun hot on his back. The tea came in and they both had some, their conversation mechanically adapted to Mrs. Gain's occasional entrances.

When she had taken the tray away, he and Belle sat for some moments in silence. It was a curious fact that during the hour or so that they had been together he had grown somehow to understand her purpose in coming to him, though not a word on the subject had passed between them. She was throwing herself back into the past—into the old poverty and the old love. Ernley had failed her, prosperity had failed her, marriage had failed her. Spiritually, she was turning from the Crown to the George, as she had done before.

"Well, my dear, what are we going to do?"

She stood up, and walked round the table into the patch of sunshine where he sat. Then she sank, spreading like a peony at his feet.

"Oh, Daniel, I've come to you."

"To me, my lovely—why to me?"

"Because I want you."

There was no gladness in either of their voices.

"Don't you want Ernley any more?"

"No."

"Nor the children?"

"No."

"I don't believe you."

"You would if you understood what I've been through during these last weeks—seeing him turn from me, seeing the children dividing us instead of bringing us together, seeing everything . . . die. Oh, Dan, Ernley's dead and the children are dead, and I'm only the poor widow and mother who's come to you. Dan, be good to me and take me. You were good to me years ago, and there's never been anyone like you for love and kindness—if only I hadn't been cursed."

She hid her face on his knee, and they both trembled. He forced himself to speak.

"But, my dear, don't you see how hopeless it all is? What can I do for you now? I make barely enough money to keep myself and the boy. We'd simply go under."

"No, we shouldn't. You could get better paid work if you went to another place, and I could work too. I'm used to working, and part of my trouble's been that I've had no work lately, at least none that I could understand. Dan, don't you see this? I'm done to the bottom, and nothing worse can happen to me than what has happened. If we had to be servants together, it would be happier for me than being the landlord's wife at the Crown. And don't you see that you're down to the bottom, too?—that you've nothing to lose? Your sister-in-law will take care of your baby for you. You won't have to worry about him—it'll be only our two selves, and, as I say, we're at the bottom already, so we can't fall any lower."

Dan's heart was beating violently. The wall of the future seemed to topple, and he saw beyond it a dark night into which he and Belle walked alone, hand in hand, leaving

everything behind them, seeing nothing but sorrow, yet together. Years ago he had hoped to possess her with all that he most loved in life, and now she was offered to him alone, a fellow-victim, stripped and cast out. Yet he wanted her as much as when her love would have brought comfort instead of privation, pride instead of shame.

"Belle, how can I take you like that?" For her sake more than his he still struggled a little. "You'll regret it someday, and then in your heart you'd reproach me. You couldn't help it. We'll be without everything—we'll be outside—no friends, no home, no money, Belle!"

"I shan't mind. I'd rather have love and nothing than everything without love, and seemingly I've got to choose. Besides, it won't always be like that. We'll find work somewhere, and Ernley will divorce me and then we can get married."

Dan's eyes grew big at the idea of divorce. It sounded grand, but outside the normal round of human experience either in Sark or Bullockdean. Still, all that was very far ahead. Nothing was close to him but Belle in her disillusion and wreck, turning to him as to her one comfort, claiming him out of the past. She suddenly knelt upright on the floor in front of him and held out her arms. He caught her, dragging her over his knees, straining her to his heart. Once more the wall of the future was built up, and the darkness hidden. The past seemed to go over his head like a flood, bringing all his old love and joy and pain in her. He was like a man drowning in a place where waters meet.

§ 3

When they drew apart from that embrace, something had changed in him. He no longer felt sorrowful and fear-driven; his heart was light, his outlook triumphant. The scheme of his life till now seemed to him in this elated moment a very mean scheme. His days on the 'bus, his nights in Greville Row, even his twilight musings on New-

haven Bridge, when the armies of the ships lifted their spears up to the sky, even these seemed trite and humdrum compared to the wonderful adventure of taking Belle out alone into an empty world.

The difficulties that lay ahead were traps for glory. He saw himself conquering fate, swimming the sea of workless post-war England, reaching a harbour of well-paid independence and building a home anew. Even the thought of parting from Thomas Helier did not seriously distress him. Besides, in the fullness of time, he too would have his place in that new house which love should build.

Drawing Belle again into his arms, he took from her lips more power, more peace, more manhood, till he could have left that room to go through fire or walk the waters. He had never felt anything quite like this in his earlier experience of her—this sensation of drawing bigness from her bigness and strength from her strength. She had always been, too, as it were, related to other things—to ideals and hopes which formed a background to his love for her. But now she stood alone, torn out of her background, and yet somehow immense as she had never been when she belonged to it.

The sun in the street was dipping towards the roofs, and the half-drawn blind was an amber glare.

"We'll go out," said Dan. "Come out with me, Belle. We can't stop in the house."

"Where are we going?"

"We'll go and have supper somewhere—in a shop—in a hotel. Then I'll take you to the pictures. We must do something this first night."

She picked up her hat from the floor.

"When ull you take me away?" she murmured, "right away?"

'I must finish my week on the 'bus."

"No! No!" her voice came suddenly with fear. "We can't wait. Ernley might find us."

"Let him."

"Oh, no, I couldn't bear it."

Her eyes grew large and frightened, and her breast heaved. Dan suddenly saw a vision of himself that he had often seen before—an odious, practical little cad, whose chief thought was bread and butter.

"All right, we'll cut and run. I'll take Baby to Em's to-morrow."

He asked Mrs. Gain to fetch Thomas Helier that evening and put him to bed—a task she had already performed occasionally when he was at Hoddern. Then, while Belle went to her attic to tidy her dress and hair, he ran up to his room and opened the drawer where he kept his money. It was in a small, battered cash-box, and amounted in all to some three pounds—his Christmas gratuity from the 'bus company and tips from one or two passengers whom he had sensationally befriended. It was all he had in the world, but it was part of his mood now that he should spend it, that it should be flung into the heap of his welcome for Belle's love.

CHAPTER TWELVE

§ 1

THEY ate their meal at the Cimerosa Cafe, a big place attached to the leading picture-house and satisfying local ideals of smartness. Otherwise, there were few elegant resorts in Newhaven. The shore-walking sailormen off the Geordies and other coasting craft sought homeliness rather than elegance and were catered for by a multitude of small taverns and shops. The London & Paris Hotel provided for the more sophisticated tastes of the passing population of the boat trains. For the 'busman's holiday and the shop-girl's night out there was the Cimerosa Cafe, with its inlaid tables and mirrored walls to provide a glitter of luxury and a certain approximation to those homes of splendour whose doors would be thrown open on the screen of the picture-house beyond.

Both Belle and Daniel were much impressed as they sat together at their little table, an island in the midst of the vastness. All round them was the glitter of glass and steel, polished tiles and polished wood, flowers made at once cheaper and more impressive by masses of gypsofola and asparagus fern, while the tinkle and wail of a piano and two fiddles came threading a plaintive way through the clatter of knives and voices.

Dan was at first struck dumb by the elegance of the waitress and the profusion of the menu. But between them, he and Belle managed at last to stumble upon the materials of a meal. They had soup, fried cutlets with French beans, and finally a fruit salad. Belle, as once mistress of the Crown, knew more about food than Daniel, and also chose the sauterne that her lover was drinking for the first time.

Though more at their ease when they had begun eating, they scarcely talked during their dinner. They belonged to that order of society which is too polite to talk when music is being provided for its entertainment. They listened respectfully to each selection as if they had been at a concert, and applauded respectfully at the end. Belle ate slowly and sat dreamily, hardly seeming to notice her surroundings. Dan, on the other hand, stared about the room, watching the other diners and the waitresses moving among them, interested in their manners and their food, as it was his custom to be interested in other people's concerns. There was another smaller hall beyond the first, and from where he sat he could see a part of it reflected in the mirror opposite him. In the mirror he saw a man and woman come in together and sit down at a table under a palm. The elegance of the woman's black dress and hat made him look at her twice, and with a start he recognised her as Pearl Jenner. The man was unknown.

At first, surprise and interest made him miss the significance of this encounter, but in a minute or two he realised what it meant. Belle had come to him because she believed her husband to be with another woman, and here was this other woman without him but with another man. She was certainly guiltless on this occasion, though, Dan told himself angrily, it did not follow that she had been guiltless on any other. . . . After all, Belle had made sure of her perfidy by effective if low expedients.

He wondered if Belle could see her, but Belle sat with her back to the mirror and outside the angle of direct vision. She could not see nor be seen. Then he suddenly asked himself what she would do if she realised that to-night at least her suspicions were confounded, and Ernley was innocently eating his dinner in Hastings, the blameless guest of Rotarians.

The question rushed at him out of the void, bringing with it the answer not of itself but of another question which he had not yet dared to ask. "She is here not because of her

love of me but because of her love of Ernley." His hand shook as he quickly raised his glass, and the glitter of the room with its lights and glass and silver flowers seemed to heel over as in a nightmare. By an act of violence he pushed the question which had no answer and the answer which had no question out of his mind together. At the same time he stood up. He must do something—he must settle something—find out something about Pearl Jenner and why she was there. Then perhaps he would not trouble about Belle and why she was there.

"Where are you going?" asked Belle, waking out of her dream.

"I'm going to ask if they have any programmes. I'll be back in a minute."

He had seen some posters of the cinema entertainment displayed in the inner room, and first of all he went and scanned these and took a couple of leaflets. On his way back he stopped at Pearl Jenner's table.

"Good evening," he said.

Miss Jenner lifted her large rather prominent eyes from her plate and surveyed him carefully without a word. In that glance Dan saw a grease mark on his waistcoat exposed, his collar and tie dismissed as impossible.

"I believe we've met before," he said nervously.

Miss Jenner obviously did not remember the occasion, and her escort now joined her in her stare. Dan was nearly overwhelmed, but managed to stand his ground.

"It was at Bullockdean—the George Inn. You came with Mr. Ernley Munk to meet my—to meet his—leastways . . ."

Luckily she remembered now.

"Oh, yes. But that was a long time ago."

"More'n three years."

"Fancy your remembering."

She had lost the deficiencies of his collar and tie in the dark, broad comeliness of his face, with the tan of the summer roads upon the cheeks, and the brightness of love and excitement in the eyes.

"I ain't likely to forget."

He thought a touch of gallantry would not come amiss. Then suddenly his gaze fell to her hand and saw that she wore a wedding ring.

"Are you married now?" The words broke straight out of his surprise.

She bridled suitably.

"Yes, I'm married. This is my husband, Mr. Percy Johnson. We're going to Paris—travelling for his firm."

"Oh."

"He's got a job over there, and we thought we'd tack it on to our honeymoon. We had meant to cross to-night, but there's too much swell on for me, so I said we'd stop at the London & Paris Hotel."

He seemed properly impressed.

"Sit down and have a drink of something with us," said Mr. Percy Johnson.

"No—no—much obliged, I'm sure. I've got a friend waiting. Good-bye."

"So pleased to have met you," said the lady graciously.

Daniel fled.

He walked quickly back into the next room and sat down opposite Belle.

"It begins at half-past eight. We'd better be going."

"Well, I'm ready. What a time you were."

"I met a chap I knew."

His heart was sick because he knew that he had not the courage to tell her about Pearl Jenner who was now Pearl Johnson.

§ 2

He told himself it did not really matter. The thing that mattered was Belle's jealous suspicion of Ernley, not the question of whether it was or was not justified. After all, it probably was justified, though Miss Jenner had seen the wisdom of escaping from a difficult situation by the most convenient road. Ernley had certainly deceived his wife,

plotted and schemed and lied. He had made Belle's life a torture by uncertainty, as she had made his a boredom by certainty. Their marriage was smashed—trodden in pieces—by themselves. What did anything else matter?—Pearl Jenner or Pearl Johnson? Daniel stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and having paid his bill, led the way out of the Cimerosa Cafe into the Cimerosa Palace.

'We'll have a box," he said to Belle as she followed.

"But—"

"I don't care. We must have a good time to-night."

The desire to strip the future was even more fiercely upon him.

So Belle and Daniel went into the house of Life together.

Life moved before him, flickering on a screen in a procession, as the procession of life moves before the immortal gods. Those 'busmen and shop-girls in the darkness were as the immortal gods, seeing as in a mirror for their sport, life and love and death and hate and jealousy and wealth and despair and laughter and tenderness and vice and beauty and age and youth and piety and folly. . . . Scenes of splendour, a great country house full of servants, rooms that were halls, halls that were the naves of Cathedrals, meals that were banquets—vicarious luxury for the immortal gods, making them forget the stained table-cloths and bed sitting-rooms of their experience. Scenes of squalor, drink and violence, nothing to eat . . . pity bringing comfort to the immoral gods, who see the depth beneath them and are content. . . . Far lands, palms, temple bells, spreading pagodas rising tier on tier above the ageless dragon-shaped trees, an echo of gongs and terror—and the immortal gods forget the limits of the Southern Railway and have seen the world and yet are thankful that they sit at home. . . . A royal garden-party—greatness condescending at a factory—a fashionable cricket match . . . elegance for the immortal gods, the wand passed over their jap silks and serge reach-me-downs . . . a drama of Life—Vice and Virtue matched

as through the million ages: vice purple-mouthed, virtue starry-eyed—vice drinking champagne and dancing on a restaurant table, virtue weeping and putting the babies to bed—vice flaunting, virtue shrinking,—vice trapped in a burning theatre and destroyed sensationally, virtue welcoming erring weakness home with close-up of forgiveness—the Moral Sense of the immortal gods is satisfied. . . . The loveliest most aloof of animal souls takes on human weakness, and shows the immortal gods their own silly vices, shifts, and philanderings through a diminishing glass. Felix keeps on walking and the gods laugh. . . . They laugh again as a greater than Grimaldi comes before them, futile, pathetic, exalted. Here are the shifts of humanity, laughable, piteous, and yet dignified. He fools, falls, blunders, and is cursed and blessed, and when he has gone there is more laughter, and among it the first real tears the immortal gods have shed. For the greater than Grimaldi has shown them human nature as immortal gods should see it—as a thing of futility and dignity, tears and laughter. . . . Now "Next week's features" and "God save the King" and the immortal gods have descended from their velvet thrones and are 'busmen and shop-girls once more in the street, clasping each other as the crowd disperses on the pavements and the great arc-lamps of the entrance die.

Dan's arm was clasping Belle as he led her homewards. His body was drugged by her sweetness, and his mind was drugged by Life. They did not speak, for their thoughts were passing in a procession as on a screen. Belle walked with her head bent, one arm hanging limply, one hand holding Dan's hand against her waist. Dan walked with his head high, and saw the lamplight in her yellow hair and breaking into the shadows flung by her hat. They came together to Greville Row, and stood together in the narrow hallway, with the door shutting out the street lamp and the moon.

Behind them the steep, narrow stairs soared into a still

deeper darkness. Dan's arms came out and took Belle, drawing her big shoulder down on his, holding her flushed face and rough hair down against his cheek.

"Oh, Belle," he murmured thickly in her hair, "oh, Belle —I must love you."

And all the House of Life danced before the darkness of his closed eyes that were closed against hers. She shuddered in his arms, moved herself suddenly, and broke from him, crying bitterly.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

§ 1

THE smallness of the house shook with her dash upstairs and the banging of her door. For a moment Dan stood at the stair-foot, then he too turned and went upwards. He felt mentally bruised, but still exalted, as he opened the door of his little room and went in. The moon and the street lamp were together in a queer troubled light, and the occasional surfaces of furniture gleamed in pale flecks. His bed was all white, and Thomas Helier's bed beside it, with a blot which was Thomas Helier himself.

Dan went over to the window, and looked out on the roofs without seeing them. Why had Belle cried when she left him? He knew that women cry for joy as much as for sorrow, but he did not think that Belle had cried for joy. How could she have cried for sorrow with his arms round her and the vows of his love upon her? Only because she still loved Ernley and still belonged to him. Only because she loved Ernley so much that when she saw her marriage breaking she had deliberately killed it rather than let it drag on as a broken thing. He, Daniel, was only the stick she had taken to break her marriage, to put her wounded love out of its pain. He was not there to give her love but to kill her love. That night she was expecting him to go up to her room and kill the last of her love for Ernley. To-morrow she would wake up without love, empty, like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

He shut his eyes again and the darkness flickered as with lights on a screen. He saw the procession of his love for Belle—his courtship of her at Batchelor's Hall, the tall houses and the tall nodding trees, and the black-and-white striped

drawing-room where the gramophone played. He saw himself going to seek her up the narrow lanes by Rushlake Green, and pleading with her in the cottage at Three Cups Corner, where the white brides mocked him from the wall. . . . Then he saw her and Ernley standing together in the doorway of old Gadgett's bedroom, holding each other by the hand, and looking at each other with sad eyes, as if they looked forward into their marriage and saw it appointed for sorrow. . . .

He knew that his love had ended there. After that there had been no love, only despair, and then escape . . . and since he had come back he had not loved her as in the old days, but in a different, unhappier way. He loved her for herself and himself only. He loved her as other men had loved her before Ernley, and to-night his love for her was just a flame, seeking to devour—not the flame of the hearth where the food is cooked and life made warm and secure, but the flame of the burning house, which seeks only to destroy and is the enemy of the hearth upon which the dead, burnt house shall fall.

He opened his eyes again and looked down at the little dark shape of Thomas Helier asleep in his moonlit bed. Then he remembered his own marriage. Till that moment it had been merely an empty space in his thoughts of Belle. But now it became an island, and the rest of life the empty sea. That year of his married life, belonging to the stranger, the strange land and the strange language, was none the less his heart's true home and abiding sweetness. All that he had ever known of love was that marriage, which had gathered up into itself not only his love for Rose Falla but his love for Belle Shackford. His love for Belle had led him to his marriage with Rose, and his love for Belle had been made holy by his marriage with Rose.

Oh, Rose, Rose—dear little Rose—I remember that evening when I took you into my arms in the dark cottage at Moie Fano, and outside was the cliff like a terrible blind thing asleep in the light. Something better than love had

given you to me then. I thought, 'All my love is in Sussex with Belle Shackford'—and reckon I never knew that love was in our marriage and nowhere else. . . . If I let Belle use me to break her marriage, I break my own—I break faith with Rose—I break faith with Belle. I cannot love a woman away from marriage; if I did that my love would be like the cliff at Moie Fano—a terrible blind thing asleep in the light.

He sank down on his knees before the window, and his thoughts which had been drowned came out of the water, and he knew himself to be set on a mad and evil way. He was about to break a marriage—a wounded marriage, it is true, but not wounded to death. Belle had taken Ernley as he had taken Rose—*"pour le mieux et pour le pire"*—"for better for worse." He had known nothing of the worse in his marriage with Rose, for his Rose had been a sweet flower plucked before the rains. But if they had lived on together, they would probably have had to forgive just like everyone else. He could have forgiven Rose anything, Rose would have forgiven him anything. By that same power Ernley could forgive Belle and Belle could forgive Ernley. And Belle had less to forgive Ernley than she thought. . . . There lay Daniel's shame. He was a thief breaking into the inn of marriage with a lie. What does it matter? The inn of marriage is empty, it is already robbed. No, love is still there. Respect and trust and seemliness are gone, but love is still there, sitting alone and waiting for the others to come back . . . love of the mother for the children and the children for the mother, love of the wife for the husband and the husband for the wife. Belle knew that, and that was why she wanted him to break into the inn of marriage and help her kill love—love waiting in the empty house till her children return. . . . "But I can't do that—I can't—because for a year I too lived with love in the inn of marriage, and if I kill Belle's love for her husband I kill my own for Belle, my own for Rose, my own for our child, since these are all part of the same thing. Oh, God, I can't do it—I can't hurt

the best thing you've ever given me—your own thing—part of yourself."

§ 2

The dawn was breaking, with the masts of the ships standing up before it like spears before a banner. Dan still knelt beside the window in the dishevelment of a sleepless night. His collar was askew, and that tie damned of Pearl Johnson was under one ear. His hair was rumpled out of its sleekness and the long straight lick of it hung sideways almost to his shoulders. He must clean and tidy himself before he went up to Belle and told her that his own marriage had been too great a treasure for him to be the thief of hers.

He must tell her at once, so that she could go back at once to Ernley. If she went now, the situation might be saved. Indeed, the very fact of her having gone away might take from her that certainty which had so disenchanted her husband. This thing that had happened might be the very thing needed to establish happiness for Belle and Ernley. Whether Belle had loved Daniel or not, or Ernley had loved Pearl or not, was no matter. Pearl and Daniel had been useful to break up a hard piece of life, and now that their task was done, Pearl could go to her Mr. Johnson, and Daniel could go . . .

He plunged his head into his basin of cold water. What should he do when he had lost Belle? Didn't he still love her? Yes, but that terrible, stripped future which had once enticed him now filled him entirely with fear. He could not take Belle away from everything that truly belonged to her —her marriage, her home, her husband, her children . . . any more than he could go away himself from all that truly belonged to him—his marriage, his home, Rose Falla, or *"notre Helier."* Somehow, at the back of his mind he knew that if he lost these things he lost Belle with them, and if he kept them he kept her with them.

The baby was still asleep. He had slept peacefully all through the night of his father's distress. Soon he would be

waking and demanding attention in one form or another. Poor little kid. At least, one would not have to part with him now . . . or only for a little while. His father would have to go away for a little while, to forget this new sound of Belle's footsteps in his life. Going away was a great cure for everything—made everything seem like shadows on glass. . . . Then when you came back you could pick up things again in a new way. He had picked up his love for Belle in a new way. If he had picked it up in the old way, he could not have renounced it now. But there was sea-water in the blood of his father's son, and a sea-change was a change of heart. When did the *White King* sail from Middlesborough? . . .

§ 3

From Belle's window too one could see the masts of the ships, but now the sunlight gleamed upon them—they were no longer lances but Aaron's rod in flower. As Dan came stooping into the attic with its low-set window, the first thing he saw was the flowering of Aaron's rod against the sea. The dawn was full of colour—rose and brown and blue, and the breeze of it rushed into the attic, both salt and sweet.

It was almost like an encounter, and gave him a queer sense of exaltation, and the strength to look at Belle as she lay on the bed, outside the clothes, wrapped in a purple cotton kimono, over which her hair flowed tawney and challenging. Her face was hidden in the hollow of one elbow, and she slept incredibly, in spite of his knock and his entrance and the flowering of the dawn.

But immediately he came and stood beside her she woke. She sat up, sweeping the hair out of her eyes. Her hair frightened him, it was so aggressively abandoned, so bright, so coarse, so curly. . . . He remembered the fine silk of Rose's hair among his fingers and upon his lips. Belle had let down her hair to smother and bind him—a crude and easy charm. He suddenly felt very far away from her.

"Well," she said sullenly, "what do you want now?"

"I want to talk to you."

He pulled a chair beside the bed and sat down. She yawned and stretched her arms, then suddenly burst into tears.

"Belle—Belle—don't cry. You know you don't really love me."

"Since when have you discovered that?"

Her voice was not sweet.

"Since I said good night to you—when you cried. . . . I guessed then that you'd come to me not because you loved me but because you loved Ernley."

"You're damned clever, ain't you."

"And, Belle, I saw I was a swine, for I was keeping something back from you—something about Ernley."

"What?"

"That he hasn't been with Pearl Jenner at Hastings."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw her here in Newhaven last night."

Belle seized his arm.

"She was at the Cafe," faltered Daniel, realising how treacherous he must now appear. "I saw her in the other room—that's why I went in to get a programme, and—"

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I knew it ud made a difference to your feelings about Ernley. You see, it wasn't only that she was there—she'd got a man with her—her husband."

"D'you mean to say she's married?"

"Just. They're off to Paris to-day."

"And you never told me?"

"I—I couldn't."

"Why? Why?"

"Because I knew it ud mean I'd lose you—you'd go back to Ernley after that."

"Cad!" shrieked Belle. "You dirty little cad!"

She sprang off the bed, and stood before him barefooted on the floor, blazing with anger. She was so much the virago that he almost cowered, and the shame of his own fear made

him angry too. He rose to his feet, and then suddenly the fear of his own shame drove down upon him and swept the anger out of his heart. After all, Belle was right. He had behaved like a cad with that lie of silence. If Belle had not wept like that at the foot of the stairs, how much of her life would he have left her? She was saved only by her tears.

"I'm sorry, Belle. Forgive me, Belle."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I loved you and reckon I wasn't strong enough to tell you something that might send you from me."

"And why are you strong enough now—when it's too late?"

"My dear, it ain't too late."

"Too late! Of course, it's too late. I've stopped away a whole night from home. The servants all know, even if I manage to get back before Ernley does. . . . I never said anything, I just cleared out. It'll be easy enough to prove I spent the night along of you here. I reckon Ernley could get a divorce on it if he wanted to, and maybe he will want to."

"Oh, no, he won't."

"Not that I care if he does. I'll never believe he wasn't in love with Pearl Jenner; and as for her being married now, it only means that she's got a good eye for her chances, which I never doubted, and that he'll soon find somebody else. We're done with each other, so your lovely conscience and pure heart go for nothing."

"Belle, don't go mocking at my conscience and my heart. I don't set up for being good, I know I ain't. But I just felt as somehow I couldn't spoil a thing like marriage."

"Marriage! What are you talking about? Mine's spoilt already, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't. You only think so because you've mixed up marriage with love, and they ain't the same thing really."

"You needn't tell me that."

"I mean that when you're in love and go back on each

other, you generally can't forgive, but in marriage you can —always."

Belle sat down heavily upon the bed.

"What's come over you, Daniel?"

"Nothing. It's the same as I've always felt, but can't explain. I think a lot about marriage. I never was more surprised by anything than I was by my marriage. I've never told you about it, Belle, but it was like this. I met a girl at a dancing-place in Jersey, and she told me she was done for and must go on the streets for a living. I'd had a drop too much, so when I got worked up about what she told me, I never stopped to think sense, but just put her in my boat and took her over to Sark with me. Then that crowd at the Pêche à Agneau wouldn't keep her. They said she must go back, and she cried . . . and begged me to save her. . . . So just out of pity I said I'd marry her, and I was in a mortal funk about it. I didn't really love her and was only doing it out of pity. But I swore I'd go through with it, for it was up to me, so to speak. Then when we went into church and the minister prayed and I put on her ring I suddenly saw it all different . . . and when I came out of church I knew we belonged to each other and ud be happy together, no matter how it had all started. And after that . . . well, I can't speak about it. But . . . well, of course you know she died. But if it had gone on, it would always have been good, because we were like being one person, and if one went against the other it would just be like being sick with yourself, as you are at times. You always forgive yourself in the end—you can't help it. And then there's the kid, there's your kids, Belle. You can't get shut of a marriage so easy as you think, by just walking out of the door. It's all mixed up with everything else in your life."

Belle sat silent, leaning her head against the bed-post.

"You can't get shut of a marriage," Daniel repeated. "All that talk about divorce is just silly. You're a part of Ernley and the children are a part of you both, and there you are, and nothing can be done about it."

"Oh, can't it, just! And reckon it will be done when Ernley finds out."

"There ain't nothing for him to find out, except that you loved him so much that you were driven half mad when you thought he loved somebody else. You know you don't really love me, Belle. It's twice you've taken me because you loved Ernley, but reckon I can't bear any more of that."

"And you don't really love me."

"No, all I've ever done is to want to get married. I'm not the same sort as you. I can't go in for these big love affairs and all that. They scare me and I act silly. I'd have loved you as my wife and have made you a good husband, but I can't go loving you outside marriage. I'm not made that way. The only woman I've ever loved is Rose, just because she was my wife."

"And now she's dead, will you marry again?"

"Maybe. I could love any good woman that was my wife. I'm sorry, Belle, I know it doesn't sound very good, but it's the way I'm made. It means that I'll always be happier than you, but not so interesting."

Belle smiled, and for the first time he saw almost a look of tenderness in her eyes.

"You poor child. Reckon I've scared you. No, maybe I'm not your sort, Daniel. Though the Lord knows that the trouble with Ernley has been because of my being too homely since I married. He never thought of my becoming a mother when I had children."

"It'll do him a lot of good, your going off like this—he won't feel so sure of you. Ernley doesn't like feeling sure."

"Well, I do."

"And so you will, if he doesn't."

Belle stood up again and went towards the window, twisting up her hair as she walked. The action seemed somehow to show that she had done with him.

"You talk sense, Daniel. You do sometimes. You've treated me badly this last day and night, but I've treated you badly these years. Reckon you're the sort of a man that

women make a refuge of. Well, I won't do it again. I hope you'll meet some kind, good woman who'll marry you and protect you from the likes of me. For if I go back to Ernley, I don't expect I'll be happy—not for years, anyway. But of course I know in my heart that he belongs to me and I to him, and nobody else will ever do. I dare say we'll both be all the better for this shake-up—I dunno. He's hit me and been hurt—I've hit him and been hurt. . . . There's no telling what difference that ull make. But you'll have to keep out of it, Daniel. Ernley will hate you after this."

"Hate me! That's odd, after all that's gone before."

"If he doesn't hate you, the same as I hate Pearl Jenner, I'll know it's all no use."

"Well, anyhow I'll be going away."

"Where?"

Daniel looked out towards the sea.

"My father wrote only the other day, offering me a berth as cook on a Geordie sailing next week from Middlesborough."

"And what will you do with the child?"

"Leave him with Em."

"Shall you be happy at sea?"

"Happier than in spoiling your life on land."

"You haven't spoiled my life, Daniel. I've spoiled my own. Perhaps it's not quite spoilt."

She held out her hand to him, and he took it limply.

"Oh, Belle—"

"I must dress now. Get out. I hope they haven't heard us talking."

"Not up here. I'll go down. Will you be having breakfast with me and get an early start?"

"Yes, I must be back when Ernley comes. Then I can tell him everything and perhaps he will tell me something."

He went out, with nothing in his heart except a great longing for the sea.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

§ 1

"TICKETS, please"—Daniel stooped over the fat woman in the corner and waited while she fumbled in her pocket and then in her bag and then in her basket—"Sixpence to Whitesmith. Thank you, Ma'am. . . . Tickets please."

He had picked up this lot at Bullockdean Throws, where he had set down Belle, and while he was helping them in with their bundles she had walked off up the lane towards the village and the inn that straddled the way. He had not even been able to turn round and see the last of her disappearing. The day was grey and windy and she had been in it like a flame, and like a flame she had gone out.

He thought of their breakfast together in the half-light of the little sitting-room. They had scarcely talked and she had seemed angry, but when their maimed excuses and explanations had gone to Mrs. Gain, Belle had insisted on accompanying him when he took Thomas Helier to the "creech," and at parting she had kissed the baby and he had taken and held for a moment a handful of her coarse yellow hair. Then they had walked together to the 'bus, and Dan had punched Belle's ticket for her and then gone out on the step. He did not dare look at her as she sat there like a sunflower. Not that he was afraid of her any more. That madness had passed; but when he looked at her he was ashamed.

"Bullockdean Corner"—he pulled the bell. The 'bus stopped. She climbed down, with her hand upon his wrist like any other passenger. He passed out her bag. Other passengers crowded in—she was gone—and when the 'bus had started again and he looked round he could not see her.

He might never see her again—he did not know. Already the ways of land were tiring him, and his tongue, in the interests of his passengers, busied itself with names like Swanborough Manor, Beddingham Throws, the Brooks, his mind was resting in names like Elphick's Tree, Les Ridens, and other names of the land which is under the sea, where the Geordies go, sailing out of the mouth of the Ouse.

Here was Ouse River, flowing through Lewes. The streets of Lewes Town piled themselves on either side of it, and the downs rose beyond the streets, while in the south stood Firle Beacon and Mount Caburn, pillars of the Gate of Lewes. . . . Here they were at the very bottom of the pit, the well of the downs and the well of the streets, and Ouse River flowing under the bridge, under the streets, away from Lewes . . . out through the Brooks, down the valley past Bullockdean and Southease and Piddinghoe, into the grey of Newhaven streets, under Newhaven Bridge, down through the armies of the ships with their lances in rest, and then out into the new country of winds and waves and waters, the free river that has found the sea.

§ 2

"Reckon you've done the right thing this time," said Jess Harman.

She stood facing Dan as he sat by the kitchen table in Bullockdean Parsonage, with Thomas Helier on his knee.

"I'm glad you approve of me at last."

"I won't say I've always disapproved, but then I haven't always approved, neither."

"You never approved of me and Belle."

"Never. She isn't your sort, as you've been uncommon slow to understand."

"Why isn't she my sort?"

"You've asked me that question a dunnamany times before, and I've told you a dunnamany times in answer that she isn't comfortable enough for you. You want a comfortable

woman, and Belle isn't a comfortable woman. Whatever she does, she does uncomfortably. If she loves a man she gives him hell; if she marries a man she gives him hell; if she loves her children she gives everybody hell because of it. Now some men like that style. Ernley Munk does, so that's why it's good that she should marry him and stick to him. All these rows they have don't matter; they only keep 'em going. Neither Belle nor Ernley could live without rows and feeling ill-treated, so it's just as well they've got each other. Now if you'd taken Belle away from Ernley and been good to her, she'd have been dead of dullness in a year. It's her sort to make rows. And all that fuss about Pearl Jenner was only a row she'd made to keep herself lively. And Ernley just about loves to think he's ill-used and blighted, so reckon it was a godsend to him to have his wife run away with another man, so long as she comes back and gives him the fun of forgiving her."

Dan had not meant to tell Jess so much about himself. He had come to Bullockdean with the intention of opening his grief to Mr. Marchbanks, which was one of the good things his friend had taught him. Between two Norman pillars in Bullockdean Church the events of the last few months had slipped into new places, and, as had so often happened before, Dan saw his splash of folly as little more than the spate cast up by a treacherous sea, in the waves of which he might have drowned while he feared only the foam.

When he got back to the Parsonage, Jess was waiting to give him tea, and comforted and a little exalted, he found himself pouring out his tale anew to her, though with different stresses. He wanted to hear about the family at the inn. Ernley had taken his wife away to foreign parts. Business was slack and they were going to have a holiday —another honeymoon. When they came back the amalgamation of the two inns, the George and the Crown, would be complete, a new life would be beginning: and Daniel Sheather, out of the old life, would be safely busy on board

a Geordie coaster, working and whistling in his galley that smelt of soup and the sea.

"Is it all fixed?" asked Jess.

"Yes, it's fixed. Dad's old man says he's unaccountable pleased to have me. Reckon Dad's been pitching him no end of a yarn about my cooking. May I take your book with me, Jess?"

"You've got a nerve. What will I do without my book?"

"Much better than I'll do with it. Reckon I must cut some sort of a figure this first voyage—and Mr. Marchbanks don't notice what you give him."

"That's true. Well, you can have the book, Daniel. But bring it back when you come ashore."

"Reckon I'll bring you a new one. I'll have some cash to spare then, though I'm stoney-broke just now. The sea pays better than the land."

"And when do you start?"

"I go north to-morrow—the nine o'clock from Lewes."

"Have you said good-bye to your mother?"

"I'll call at Hoddern this evening on my way back."

"And you're leaving Baby at Brakey Bottom."

"Yes, that's to-night, too."

Then suddenly Jess's face changed—her manner changed. She was a new Jess, and coming round the side of the table, she knelt down beside Daniel's chair and put her arms round the baby that he held upon his knee.

"Leave him with me, Daniel. Let me take care of him for you."

Her voice came with a sudden husky sweetness, reminding him of Belle's.

"But, Jess, how can I? How could you possibly look after him?"

"Easy. I can have him with me here, same as I had when you lived along of us, and I can take him home to Auntie's in the evening. Reckon they won't be sorry at Brakey Bottom, and you can give me what you would have given them, so as I can manage for him. Oh, Dan, I love

him so and it's been such misery losing him when you were at Newhaven. I'll be so good to him, I'll love him and pet him and take care of him, same as if I was his mother."

For some reason he found himself trembling, and his hand came down upon her shoulder as she knelt beside him with her arms round the child. He said, almost without knowing it:

"But, Jess, I think now that I'm always going to live on the sea."

"But you'll be ashore in between whiles."

"Yes,—but the sea's going to be my country. I don't belong here any more—at least, not till I'm old. The sea's better than the land, my dear, and it's in my blood to go to sea."

"You can go to sea and I'll stay on the land, for sometimes you've got to come home."

In that moment he felt it would be easier and better to think of home at Bullockdean than at Brakey Bottom, among the wranglings and strugglings of his kin. Perhaps Jess would not take such good care of Thomas Helier as Emmy would have done; but Len was sour. . . . Jess was taking him out of love, and there would always be love at Bullockdean. It seemed as if Rose Falla's legacy to her husband had been a legacy of love. When she had given him "*notre Helier*" she had given him the power of building romance anew. . . .

"Let him stay just this once," pleaded Jess, "and if you don't think I've done well by him when you come back, you can change. But let me try."

"Very well, Jess. You try."

Thomas Helier's good manners broke down under the sudden squeeze that she gave him.

"I'm sorry, dearie, that's a bad beginning. But you're used to it with your dad and me. There don't cry, my pet —there, there."

She had lifted him off Daniel's knee and held him cuddled against her neck.

"Mum . . . Mum," murmured Thomas Helier, comforted.

"And now, Dan," said Jess, "you must be getting off, for you've a power of things to get through to-night. I'll walk with you as far as the pub, and we'll go in and have a glass of ale together. You can get a Number One Bass there now—no more of those Hobday & Hitch's swipes. We'll go down together and have a drink to your good luck."

§ 3

Two hours later Dan knelt by his mother's side in the firelight at Hoddern. Kitty's arm was round him, for she felt and dealt tenderly in this moment of farewell.

"You always were your father's son, Dan, and it is only what I expected that you should go to him, but you've been a good boy to me all the same."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mum."

"Yes, you've been good and done your best when that rascal he went off. It was not your fault that you could not help me more. Now I shall not see you very often, I expect."

"Whenever I'm ashore, mum."

"But you leave your child at Bullockdean and you go where your child is. Ah, she is a clever girl, that Jess Harman."

"How do you mean?"

"If you have not the wit to understand me, I will not explain. Poor Daniel, you were not happy in your marriage."

"Mum, I was happy."

"Ah, but she died."

He did not speak, for he could not tell his mother what he felt about Rose.

"Marriage is not a happy thing," continued Kitty. "Our men grow up and cease to love us; they forsake us, and we live only in our children."

"Oh. Mother, don't speak so; some men make good husbands."

"You would make a good husband, Daniel."

"I hope I didn't make a bad one."

"You are the sort of man who'd make a good husband to any girl except one."

"Except one?"

"Except Belle Munk—Belle Shackford that was. She belongs to one man only, though he will never be much to her. Still, she belongs. And I knew it long ago when you wanted her so much."

Dan did not believe his mother knew anything of the kind. Still he thought her words were wise, and he listened as she continued:

"Some men and women are like that—for one person only, and others are for everyone. You are among the others."

"What do you mean, mum?"

"You could be happy married to any good girl, for what you really want is not love but marriage. When you come home, you will marry again."

"How do you know?"

"Because you were made for marriage, and for a man marriage is easy."

A step sounded in the passage, and his mother's expression changed. She withdrew her arm from his shoulder and looked up. He knew that Christopher had come home.

He rose and kissed her hastily, anxious to take leave before his brother appeared. "Say good-bye to Chris from me."

Outside the big stars hung over the Ouse Valley, where the windings of the river showed pale in the darkness. Dan felt vaguely disturbed by what his mother had said. It seemed to rob him of his last claim to be interesting and romantic, if he had ever had any. Was it indeed true, then, that the woman of his dream who sat in an inn stable with her child upon her knee, was not Belle, nor even Rose, but

just any woman, every woman, whose heart was warm and whose eyes were kind? Was all that he craved for only a home, and wife and a child? If so, it was strange to go seeking them upon the sea. But there is a star of the sea. . . . A woman sits in the stable of an inn with her child upon her knee and a star in the sky above her to lead the wise man to her feet.

THE END

WITHDRAWN

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